CURSE KILLING ARC 2

Higurashi
WHEN THEY CRY

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CHAPTER 6

WOULD YOU GET SATOKO HOJO-SAN FOR ME?

WHY SATOKO OF ALL PEOPLE?

OH, NO, NO, IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS. I JUST WANT TO ASK HER A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS.

I WOULD APPRE-CIATE YOUR COOPER-ATION.

THAT CAN'T BE TRUE. NO. THIS MAN SHOULD NOT BE HERE.

...AH...

YOU MAY WANT TO SEE HER, BUT I DON'T THINK SATOKO HAS ANY REASON TO SEE YOU... WILL YOU PLEASE LEAVE?

...IF ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS TALK TO HER, YOU CAN DO IT OVER THE PHONE. COMING TO HER SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY... THAT'S NOT NORMAL.

THAT'S HARSH! ARE YOU HER MANAGER, THEN? SO I CAN'T SEE HER WITHOUT AN APPOINT-MENT, IS THAT IT!!

NA HA HA HA!

KYA HA HA

I DON'T DO WELL WITH PEOPLE WHO TALK LIKE THIS...

OH MY... ONE VALID POINT AFTER ANOTHER WITH YOU...

UM...

HOJO-SAN... ISN'T HERE TODAY...

I NEED YOU TO GET SATOKO HOJO-SAN FOR ME.

OH, HELLO! MAY I HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME?

WELL THEN.

BIKU (PERK)

HA-HA-HA-HA! I *AM* OUT OF LUCK TODAY.

ISN'T HERE?

TA CRUND

TA

TA

TA

OH...? "KEIICHI MAE-BARA" ...

...WILL YOU TELL ME THE NAME OF THE YOUNG MAN HERE WITH ME? HM?

OH... MIGHT YOU BE THE DISTINGUISHED SON OF THE FAMILY IN "MAEBARA MANOR"?

NA HA HA

YOUR FATHER IS A FAMOUS ARTIST, ISN'T HE?

I UNDERSTAND SHE CAME FROM SOME ALL-GIRLS COLLEGE. A GIRLS-COLLEGE GRADUATE AT HER AGE—IMPRESSIVE. MIGHT SHE BE THE DAUGHTER OF A WELL-TO-DO FAMILY?

SHE'S ONLY BEEN TO THAT ONE FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MEETING. THAT JUST WON'T DO.

YOU CAN'T NEGLECT YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH NEIGHBORS IN AREAS LIKE THIS. NN-HN-HN-HN.

OR SO THE RUMORS SAY. DID YOU KNOW THAT, BECAUSE OF THOSE RUMORS, THERE ARE ALSO RUMORS THAT SHE'S A COLD WOMAN?

AND YOUR MOTHER IS QUITE THE INTELLECTUAL HERSELF, CORRECT? I'VE HEARD HER ACADEMIC BACK-GROUND.

..IN AREAS LIKE THIS...

...YOU'D BETTER BE *ABSOLUTELY* SURE YOU DON'T MAKE ENEMIES.

OR ELSE...

GU (GRAB)

...A GRUDGE YOU'VE INCURRED OVER SOMETHING UNUSUAL MIGHT COME BACK TO YOU IN UNBELIEVABLE WAYS...YOU WOULDN'T... WANT THAT, WOULD YOU?

GIRI

GIRI

...YOU MIGHT MEET WITH UNEXPECTED DISADVANTAGES. THERE'S A THING CALLED KARMA, YOU KNOW?

GIRI (SQUEEZE)

PLEASE LEAVE IT AT THAT. YOU'RE HURTING HIM.

GIRI

GIRI

O-OW...!!

OH...IF IT ISN'T...IRIE-SENSEI...IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME, HASN'T IT...

I WAS PLANNING TO PAY YOU A VISIT WHEN I FINISHED UP HERE.

...YOU'RE ALWAYS SO BUSY, I CAN HARDLY GET A CHANCE TO TALK TO YOU ...

YES, I'LL ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE. IF YOU HAVE A WARRANT.

I HAVE A RIGHT...TO REFUSE TO BE TAKEN IN FOR QUESTIONS.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT!? MAEBARA-SAN!!

...NGH...

NA-HA-HA-HA!!!

...GH!

DO (THUD)

KEH.

I WILL BE LODGING A COMPLAINT WITH THE CHIEF OF POLICE ABOUT YOUR ACTIONS TODAY.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CAME HERE FOR... BUT IF YOU'RE FINISHED, THEN PLEASE GO HOME!

YOU'RE OVERREACTING... I'M THE LAST PERSON WHO WOULD DO ANYTHING TO LEAVE A SCAR ON HIM... DESPITE MY APPEARANCE, I AM A POLICE OFFICER, AFTER ALL...NN-HN-HN...

THAT *IS* A PROBLEM... NN-HN-HN...

保健室

A DETECTIVE NAMED KURAUDO OOISHI...HE'S A VIOLENT ONE. EVERYONE IN THE VILLAGE HATES HIM.

DAMMIT... WHO IS THAT GUY... !!!?

SIGN: MEDICAL OFFICE

...IT HURT SO MUCH...BUT THERE'S NOT A SINGLE BRUISE ...

...IT JUST SHOWS HOW USED TO THAT SORT OF THING HE IS...

...BUT...WHAT HAPPENED...? FOR YOU TO GET INTO A FIGHT WITH HIM...

GI (CREAK)

...HE...CAME AND SAID HE WANTED TO TALK TO SATOKO...

.....

...EH...?

...HOUND ...?

DOES HE... COME SEE SATOKO OFTEN?

...THAT MAN STILL MEANS TO HOUND SATOKO-CHAN...?

SO YOU KNEW...

...YOU MEAN THE THING ABOUT HOW SATOKO'S PARENTS SUPPORTED THE DAM PROJECT... AND DIED FALLING FROM A CLIFF BECAUSE OF THE CURSE ...?

.....

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT... OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE AND SATOKO-CHAN, MAEBARA-SAN...?

EH...? REALLY?

AFTER THEY LOST THEIR PARENTS, SATOKO-CHAN AND HER BROTHER SATOSHI-KUN WENT TO LIVE WITH THEIR AUNT AND UNCLE.

...BUT UNFORTUNATELY... NEITHER ONE OF THE COUPLE QUITE DESERVES ANY RESPECT.

THEIR UNCLE...HE'S SATOKO-CHAN'S FATHER'S YOUNGER BROTHER ...

THE COUPLE NEVER REALLY GOT ALONG TO BEGIN WITH, AND TO VENT THEIR ANGER FROM THEIR ENDLESS FIGHTS...

AT THE SAME TIME THAT THEIR AUNT AND UNCLE BECAME THEIR GUARDIANS, THEY DRAINED SATOKO-CHAN'S HOME OF ALL ITS ASSETS.

...BECAUSE SATOKO-CHAN'S PARENTS APPROVED OF THE DAM PROJECT, SURE ENOUGH, HER UNCLE AND AUNT WERE ASHAMED...

THEY WOULD ALWAYS FIND FAULT WITH THEM... THEY WOULD REBUKE THEM, YELL AT THEM, HIT THEM, WITHHOLD MEALS FROM THEM AS PUNISHMENT.

...THEY SHOVED SATOKO-CHAN AND SATOSHI-KUN INTO A TINY ROOM AND FORCED A LIFE ONTO THEM THAT SUFFOCATED THEM PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

THERE WAS NO WAY THEY WOULD WELCOME SATOKO-CHAN AND HER BROTHER... I'VE HEARD... THAT IT WAS VERY HARD ON THE TWO OF THEM.

...GH.

...I SHUDDER TO REMEMBER IT NOW...YOU'VE ONLY EVER SEEN THE CHEERFUL, ENERGETIC SATOKO-CHAN...

...SO YOU PROBABLY CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE HER... LOOKING DEATHLY PALE...JUST SITTING IN THE SHADOWS, STARING INTO SPACE...

...AND ON THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING FESTIVAL LAST YEAR...HER AUNT WAS BEATEN AND KILLED BY A CRAZY MAN ON DRUGS...

.. RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE VILLAGE'S BITTER ENEMIES WERE KILLED BY THE CURSE ON THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING FESTIVAL, SO IT WAS WHISPERED THAT THIS DEATH TOO MIGHT BE OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE.

THE CASE WAS SOLVED WHEN A MAN WHO WAS ARRESTED FOR ABUSING STIMULANTS...

ADMITTED THAT HE DID IT ALONG WITH HIS OTHER CRIME...

HER UNCLE IS FROM HINAMIZAWA TOO... HE WAS TERRIFIED OF OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE...

HE WENT TO STAY WITH HIS MISTRESS IN OKINOMYA.

...THEN WERE SATOKO AND HER BROTHER FREE?

THERE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANYONE LEFT TO TORMENT THEM...

...BUT, AS IF TAKING OVER WHERE THEY LEFT OFF, THAT MAN STARTED PERSISTENTLY APPEARING...

...OOISHI IS A LITTLE STRANGE... EACH CASE SURROUNDING THE CURSE HAS BEEN SOLVED... BUT HE'S THE ONE PERSON WHO WON'T ACKNOWLEDGE IT...

IT'S SAID THAT SOMETHING BAD INVARIABLY HAPPENS TO ANYONE HE APPROACHES.

...IN HINAMIZAWA... OOISHI...

...HAS BECOME KNOWN AS "OYASHIRO-SAMA'S MESSENGER."

ONE YEAR AGO, SATOSHI TOO WAS CONTACTED BY OOISHI RIGHT BEFORE HE DISAPPEARED

THREE YEARS AGO RIGHT BEFORE SATOKO'S PARENTS [illegible]OOISH VISITED THEIR HOME ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION

FOUR YEARS AGO, THE DISMEMBERED MURDER VICTIM MADE CONTACT WITH OOISHI SEVERAL TIMES RIGHT BEFORE THE INCIDENT.

TWO YEARS AGO, RIKA-CHAN'S MOTHER, WHO WENT MISSING, RECEIVED EXCESSIVE CONTACT FROM OOISHI RIGHT BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED.

AND THIS YEAR...

...WH-WHY...?

... BECAUSE IT'S RUMORED THAT...HE DECIDES WHO WILL BE THE CURSE'S VICTIM EVERY YEAR.

TH-THAT'S... NOT... FUNNY.

IT'S A RUMOR, MAEBARA-SAN. I'M ONLY SAYING THERE ARE RUMORS TO THAT EFFECT.

WELL THEN, MAEBARA-SAN. I'LL BE GOING TO THE FACULTY ROOM NOW...

GARA (RATTLE)

YOU HAD BETTER HURRY BACK AND JOIN EVERYONE TOO.

OYA-SHIRO-SAMA'S MES-SEN-GER.

OOISHI...

.....

NO... THIS IS NO JOKE ...

THE ANXIETY I FELT WHEN I FIRST MET THE MAN.

SO THAT WASN'T A MISTAKE, THEN...?

UNCLE AND AUNT.

SATOKO...

WHAT IS THIS...?

CURSE?

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON...?

ANXIETY...

SATOKO...

SATOKO...

SATOKO-CHAN...

I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED ...

THIS... MAKES THREE DAYS...

LIKE I'D KNOW...

!

SATOKO!

BAM! (JUMP!)

...SA-

SATOKOOOO!!

!

M-MY, WHAT IS IT, KEIICHI-SAN!?

YOU UP AND RUN AT ME, YELLING AT THE TOP OF YOUR LUNGS! YOU SCARED ME! I THOUGHT SOMETHING WAS WRONG...!

I HADN'T USED IT IN SO LONG...IT WAS JUST COVERED IN DUST...

I'M VERY SORRY. I WAS JUST CLEANING MY HOUSE A LITTLE.

WHAT THE HECK... HAPPENED TO YOU!? THREE WHOLE DAYS!! DO YOU KNOW HOW WORRIED I WAS ...!!?

YES, LET'S! I MIGHT HAVE WORRIED EVERYONE... OH-HO-HO. IT'S SO HARD BEING POPULAR.

RIKA-CHAN BROUGHT A LUNCH FOR YOU EVERY DAY! LET'S HURRY TO THE CLASS-ROOM AND LET EVERYONE KNOW YOU'RE OKAY.

...WELL, WHAT-EVER.

ISN'T IT TIME FOR LUNCH NOW?

I'M HUNGRY.

WHA? WHY WOULD YOU MISS THREE WHOLE DAYS FOR SOME-THING LIKE CLEANING ?

OR SO I THOUGHT...

...I COULD WIPE AWAY ALL MY ANXIETY.

...ONCE I SAW SATOKO AGAIN...

SHE'S MORE... FRAIL THAN USUAL ...?

SOME-HOW...

GARA (RATTLE)

HOJO-SAN!

OOHH! I WAS SO WORRIED! I WANT YOU TO COME TO THE FACULTY ROOM LATER!

OH, SENSEI! I'M SORRY FOR WORRYING YOU FOR THREE DAYS!! AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT!

.....

I SKIPPED SCHOOL FOR THREE DAYS; I'M SURE I'LL GET A GOOD SCOLDING.

OH HO HO

AH HA HA

...MION...?

PATAN (SHUT)

EVERYONE PLEASE WAIT HERE, SIRS.

WELL, I'M OFF TO THE FACULTY ROOM TO GET MY TONGUE LASHING.

GISHI (CREAK)

...HEY.

YEAH...I THINK SO TOO...

.....

...SATOKO... REALLY IS DIFFERENT THAN NORMAL, ISN'T SHE...?

...IT'S NOT LIKE... I WAS HIDING IT... UM...

...MION... COULD IT BE...

YOU'RE... HIDING SOMETHING ...?

WHA...?

GATA (CLATTER)

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING ...!!?

I-I'M SORRY ...!!

THAT IS...I KNEW...THAT SATOKO'S UNCLE... SUDDENLY CAME BACK LAST SUNDAY ...

...GH.

AND...THE RUMORS SAY...HE'S HAD SATOKO LOCKED UP IN THE HOUSE... AND BULLIED HER...WHILE HE MADE HER DO THE HOUSE-WORK...

...KEIICHI-KUN. DON'T BE SO NAIVE.

B-BUT, HEY, THAT UNCLE GUY CAN'T DO HOUSEWORK, RIGHT?

THEN...HE SHOULD BE TREATING SATOKO LIKE A VALUABLE TREASURE... HE MIGHT NOT BE BULLYING HER, RIGHT ...?

(GATA (CLATTER)

MII-CHAN, IS THAT TRUE ...!?

IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES, SO...I DON'T KNOW.

SATOSHI-KUN IS GONE.

TH-THEN... DO *YOU* KNOW, RENA...?

I DON'T KNOW. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT HER UNCLE HAD COME BACK UNTIL I HEARD IT JUST NOW.

BUT YOU KNOW, THE SITUATION HAS COMPLETELY CHANGED FROM A YEAR AGO.

...WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IF HER UNCLE IS BACK IN HINAMIZAWA, IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE THE MISTRESS HE WAS STAYING WITH DISAPPEARED, RIGHT? DO YOU THINK HE WOULD BE NICE TO SATOKO-CHAN IN THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES?

HE ALWAYS PROTECTED SATOKO-CHAN FROM THEIR MEAN UNCLE AND AUNT'S OUTBURSTS...

...SATOSHI-KUN WAS A GOOD BIG BROTHER WHO CARED A LOT ABOUT HIS SISTER...

...I'M SORRY...

RIRIIIN (RRRRRING)

RIIIIN

GARA (RATTLE)

LUNCHTIME IS OVER NOW. TAKE YOUR SEATS, EVERYONE.

...AH... NO, I'M SORRY...

I DIDN'T MEAN TO SOUND ACCUSING...

ALLLL RIGHT!! WE FINALLY HAVE ALL OUR MEMBERS AGAIN TODAY! IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, SO LET'S HAVE A BLAST!

YEAH! I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY!

EH-HEH-HEH!! JUST WHAT I WAS HOPING FOR! RIGHT, SATOKO-CHAN!? LET'S DO IT! LET'S!

EEHH!? ARE YOU SERIOUS!? WHICH CLUB RULE IS IT THAT SAYS ANYONE WHO RUNS FROM THE ENEMY GETS THE PENALTY GAME?

...STOP IT, MII-CHAN... WE CAN'T FORCE HER TO PLAY WITH US.

...I APPRECIATE IT...BUT YOUR FEELINGS ARE ENOUGH FOR ME.

...THERE ARE SOME... THINGS I HAVE TO DO...

...REALLY, YOUR FEELINGS ALONE MAKE ME VERY HAPPY.

...DON'T WORRY. THE NEXT TIME WE FIGHT, I'LL CATCH ALL OF YOU TOGETHER IN ONE GIIIIANT TRAP!

SHIN.
(SILENCE)

...SATOKO...!

PATA
(PATTER)
PATA
PATA

.....

...IS IT...
REALLY
BAD?

...RIKA-
CHAN...DON'T
YOU THINK IT'S
ABOUT TIME
FOR YOU TO
TALK TO
US...?

.....

...IT WAS LIKE THIS... WHEN SHE WAS LIVING WITH HER UNCLE AND AUNT LAST YEAR TOO, WASN'T IT?

...YEAH. BACK THEN, THEY WERE ALMOST ALWAYS TAKING THINGS OUT ON THEM...

ONE THING WE COULD DO WAS KILL TIME WITH THE CLUB SO SHE SPENT LESS TIME AT HOME, BUT...

...NOW SHE HAS ALL THE HOUSEWORK FORCED ON HER, SO WE CAN'T EVEN DO THAT...

DAM-MIT!! WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS!!?

ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN WOULD SAY IT'S CRAZY, RIGHT!?

THIS IS ABUSE, ISN'T IT!? CAN'T WE REPORT HIM TO THE POLICE OR SOME-THING!!?

PAN (WHACK)

...HE'S RIGHT. IF WE HAD PROOF THAT HE WAS HIT-TING HER, WE COULD REPORT IT, RIGHT?

OR COULD WE CONSULT THE LOCAL DISTRICT WELFARE OFFICER OR SOMETHING?

YOU PUT IT ALL SO SIMPLY ...

...BUT HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF THE RISKS INVOLVED IN ESTABLISH-ING PROOF?

RISKS? WHAT RISKS?

I THINK IT WAS WINTER, TWO YEARS AGO...WE REPORTED HIM TO THE CHILD CONSULTATION CENTER.

WE SAID THEY WERE ABUSING SATOKO AND HER BROTHER AND ASKED THEM TO DO SOMETHING RIGHT AWAY.

EH...? YOU DID? ...AND?

A PUBLIC OFFICIAL CAME RIGHT AFTER WE CALLED.

...HE ASKED SATOKO AND SATOSHI THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY.

AND WHILE HE WAS AT IT, HE ASKED THEIR AUNT AND UNCLE TOO.

...HE ASKED THEIR AUNT AND UNCLE...!?

HE SAID HE COULD PUT IT ALL TOGETHER AND MAKE A JUDGMENT BASED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STORY!! WHAT A FINE, UP-STANDING OFFICER.

...SO WHAT DID HE DECIDE ...?

TO WAIT AND SEE.

THIS OLD MAN LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE.

BY LAW, IF IT'S NOT RECOGNIZED AS "ASSAULT" OR "CHILD NEGLECT," THEY DON'T CALL IT "ABUSE."

WHAT THE HELL !!!?

FOR A WHILE, THE WELFARE OFFICER CAME TO VISIT THEM EVERY WEEK...AND APPARENTLY THE COUPLE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING DURING THAT TIME THAT SEEMED LIKE BULLYING..

...BUT THAT WOULDN'T END ANY-THING, WOULD IT? NOT NOR-MALLY.

...SO WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT...?

THEY WERE BOTH PUSHED AROUND A LOT, BUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO LEAVE ANY MARKS, AND THEY HAD TWO MEALS AND A PLACE TO SLEEP.

AND IT WASN'T LIKE WE HAD A TAPE TO PROVE THAT THEY WERE SAYING OR DOING ANY-THING TO CAUSE PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE.

...YEAH... THEIR AUNT WAS ESPECIALLY RELENTLESS ABOUT IT...

...WHICH MEANS THEY STEPPED UP THE MORE INSIDIOUS BULLYING, DIDN'T THEY?

I GUESS YOU COULD SAY IT WAS A KIND OF RELENTLESSNESS THAT'S PARTICULAR TO WOMEN...

APPARENTLY SHE WAS DOING REALLY REPULSIVE THINGS.

...TOWARD THE END... SATOKO WAS JUST LIKE A RAG DOLL WHO DID NOTHING BUT BREATHE...

UNDERSTAND? AS LONG AS WE DON'T HAVE PROOF THAT WOULD BE CLEAR AND DEFINITIVE TO ANYONE... THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO...

...WE... FAILED ...

...WE CAN'T REPORT HIM?

...IN OTHER WORDS... UNTIL WE FIND PROOF THAT WOULD BE OBVIOUS TO ANYONE...

THEY LIVED APART UNTIL NOW...BUT IF HE SAYS HE HAD A CHANGE OF HEART AND DECIDED TO LIVE WITH HER AGAIN...WE'LL BE BACK TO SQUARE ONE!

N-NO. IF HE WAS STILL GONE, THEY MIGHT ACKNOWLEDGE IT...BUT NOW THEY'RE LIVING TOGETHER AGAIN, YOU KNOW?

OH YEAH! HER UNCLE LEFT SATOKO ALL ALONE AND LIVED WITH HIS MISTRESS FOR A WHOLE YEAR...

ISN'T THAT "CHILD NEGLECT" !!?

...WE HAVE TO SHUT UP AND WATCH?

WHAT THE HELL ...?

...AND LEAVES A BIG SCAR ON SATOKO...

SO UNTIL... HE GETS VIOLENT...

WHAT THE HELL ...?

...COME TO THINK OF IT...RIKA-CHAN...HOW ARE YOU GETTING BY...?

YOU SAID THAT AFTER YOUR PARENTS DIED, YOU LIVED IN A DETACHED BUILDING OF THE SHRINE WITH SATOKO ...

...THE VILLAGE CHIEF... KIMIYOSHI-OJIICHAN* IS RIKA-CHAN'S GUARDIAN ...

IT'S OFFICIAL; HE EVEN HAS THE PREFECTURAL GOVERNOR'S APPROVAL.

SHE'S NOT A "FOSTER CHILD" THAT THEY PUT ON THE FAMILY REGISTER... BUT BY LAW, RIKA-CHAN IS LIVING AT THE VILLAGE CHIEF'S HOUSE...

*A FRIENDLY WAY OF ADDRESSING AN ELDERLY MAN

IF HE CAN BE RIKA'S GUARDIAN WITHOUT EVEN PUTTING HER ON THE FAMILY REGISTER... THEN CAN'T THE VILLAGE CHIEF BE SATOKO'S GUARDIAN TOO...EVEN IF IT'S IN NAME ONLY ...!?

WE CAN'T DO THAT! HER UNCLE THINKS ***HE'S*** HER GUARDIAN!

THEN... THE VILLAGE CHIEF JUST HAS TO ACTUALLY SUPPORT HER!! THEN HE CAN BE HER GUARDIAN IN NAME AND IN REALITY, CAN'T HE!?

HE MAY HAVE ABANDONED HER FOR A YEAR, BUT HE DID SUPPORT HER FOR THAT FIRST YEAR...!

HER UNCLE ACTUALLY HAS A PLACE FOR HER TO SLEEP AND FOOD FOR HER. THE VILLAGE CHIEF CAN'T DO ANYTHING JUST BY LOANING HER H S NAME! THERE'S NO WAY ANYONE WOULD ACCEPT IT!

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE!! SATOKO IS A GROWING GIRL!! IT'S NOT LIKE GIVING SOME-ONE A CAT TO TAKE CARE OF!!

I'M TELLING YOU!!! STOP THINKING OF SATOKO AS A PET!!

YOU'VE JUST BEEN TALKING ABOUT HANDING HER OFF TO OTHER PEOPLE!! YOU NEED TO THINK MORE CAREFULLY ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARING FOR SOMEONE'S LIFE!!!

THEN KANTOKU!! WHAT ABOUT KANTOKU!? I DON'T REALLY KNOW, BUT... HE'S RICH, ISN'T HE!?

AND BESIDES, KANTOKU CAN'T DO IT EITHER!!! YOU CAN'T BE SOMEONE'S GUARDIAN IF YOU'RE SINGLE!

OH YEAH... KANTOKU... SAID SO HIMSELF ...!!

NO...!! I...DON'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT!! BUT IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE...

YOU DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT SATOKO, DO YOU!!!? YOU'RE NOT REALLY WORRIED ABOUT HER, ARE YOU!!?

WHAT THE HELL!? DAMMIT, DAMMIT! I'M JUST DESPERATE TO THINK UP A WAY TO SAVE SATOKO, BUT ALL YOU SAY IS WE CAN'T, WE CAN'T!!!!

M-ME!!? THERE'S NO WAY!! THERE'S...NO WAY BATCHA* WOULD ALLOW IT... NO WAY!!

*ACCENTED FORM OF OBAACHAN, MEANING GRANDMOTHER

OH YEAH... WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU HAVE A GOOD FAMILY, ONE OF THE "THREE FAMILIES" OR WHATEVER, RIGHT!? YOU LIVE IN A GIGANTIC HOUSE, DON'T YOU !!?

IT'S NOT THAT HARD, IS IT!!? I'M SAYING THAT SOME-ONE WITH A LOT OF MONEY CAN TAKE CARE OF SATOKO FOR A WHILE!!

N-NO, NO, NO!! MY HOUSE IN OKINOMIYA IS EVEN WORSE!! THEY WOULD NEVER EVER ALLOW IT!

THEN WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS IN OKINOMIYA!!? THEY HAVE A BIG MANSION TOO, RIGHT!?

WHY NOT TAKE HER IN!? TELL ME!! MION SONO-ZAKI !!

YOU'RE SAYING THEY'RE DIFFERENT!!? YOU'RE HEARTLESS!! YOUR FRIEND'S IN TROUBLE!! HELP HER!!! YOU'RE THE PRESIDENT OF OUR CLUB, AREN'T YOU!!? YOUR HUMANITY IS IN QUESTION HERE!! ARE YOU LISTENING!!? MION!!?

HEY, HEY, HEY! YOU ALWAYS BRAG ABOUT BEING SUCH A BIG SHOT, BUT NOW YOU'RE THE MOST WISHY-WASHY OF ALL!! YOU JUST GONNA WATCH SATOKO DIE!!?

...NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT...! BUT THIS AND THAT ARE TWO DIFFERENT—

HIC!

HIKKU

HIKKU CHIC?

...HIC!

...MEW?

HUFF

HUFF

...KEIICHI-KUN. IF MII-CHAN CAN'T, WHY DON'T YOU LOOK FOR ANOTHER WEALTHY FAMILY?

I KNOW SOMEONE WHO LIVES IN A FINE MANSION HERE IN HINAMI-ZAWA.

PLAYING INNOCENT. YOU LIVE IN SUCH A GRAND HOUSE; IS YOUR HOUSE THE ONLY ONE THAT DOESN'T COUNT?

...WH-WHO?

THAT DISCUSSION ENDED ALL TOO FAST, DIDN'T IT!? THEN IS THAT ALL FOR TODAY!? MAYBE I'LL GO LOOKING FOR TREASURE, SINCE I HAVEN'T IN A WHILE!! DON'T BE SO QUIET!

ARE YOU LISTENING, KEIICHI MAEBARA!!?

M-MY HOUSE? MY HOUSE IS—

SHE'S YOUR FRIEND, ISN'T SHE? HELP HER. YOU SAID THAT MII-CHAN IS HEARTLESS BECAUSE SHE SAID NO.

THEN KEIICHI-KUN, WHO CARES SO MUCH FOR HIS FRIENDS, HAS TO SET THE EXAMPLE, RIGHT?

YOUR HOUSE IS SO BIG, YOU HAVE EXTRA ROOMS, DON'T YOU? YOU COULD SHARE ONE WITH SATOKO-CHAN, COULDN'T YOU?

THEN THE PROBLEM WOULD BE HAPPILY SOLVED! OH, WHAT'S THIS? OVER ALREADY!?

MIN

MIN.

MIN (HUM)

MIN

N-NO, IT'S OKAY. I'M... SORRY TOO...

GOSHI (RUB)

GOSHI

MION... I'M SORRY ...

.....

KATAN CLATTER

...

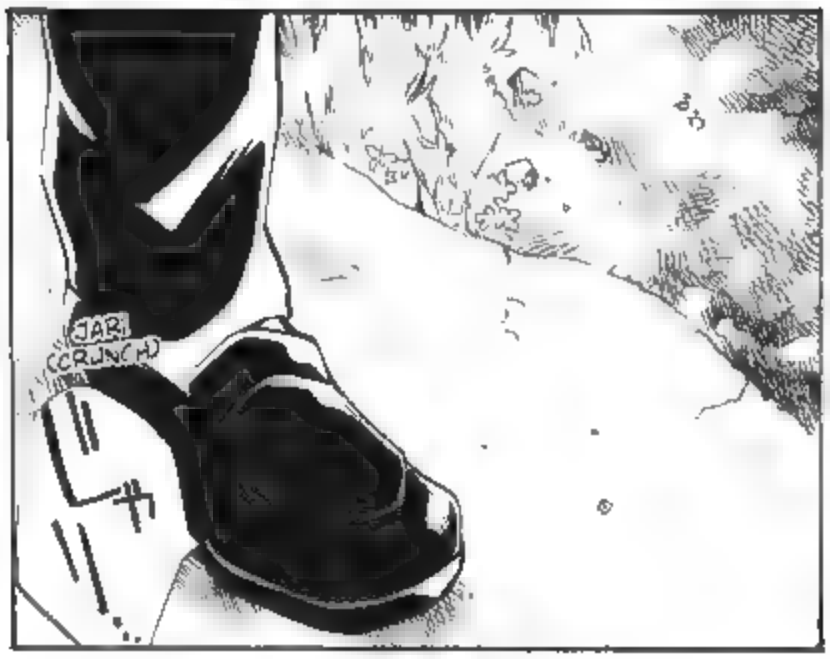
MIN CHLIMP

MIN

MIN

.....

SO ALL WE CAN DO...IS WAIT... FOR A MIRACLE ...?



WE'RE POWERLESS...

MIN

MIN

MIN

MIN

SO THIS...IS SATOKO'S FAMILY'S HOUSE...

...THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.

KIKI... (KREE)

SO WHAT AM I TRYING TO DO ...?

WHAT DO I WANT TO DO ...?

BATAN (SHUT)

!

THIS IS A COINCIDENCE. DO YOU LIVE AROUND HERE?

KANTOKU ...

SATOKO.

OH, KEIICHI-SAN...

I WAS ON THE WAY HOME FROM DOING THE SHOPPING... WHEN I HAPPENED TO RUN INTO KAN-TOKU.

HE OFFERED TO TAKE ME HOME, AND I TOOK HIM UP ON IT...

...IS HER UNCLE... AND WHAT IS HE DOING ...?

OY... AT A TIME LIKE THIS, WHERE THE HELL ...

SHE WENT ALL THAT WAY AT!?

THAT BAG... THE SUPER-MARKET OUT-SIDE OF TOWN ...!

!!

DOSA (THUD)

GASHA (CLATTER)

GASHA

...YOU REALLY HELPED ME OUT, KANTOKU... IT'S A BIT HARD... GOING UP THAT HILL.

HE SENT... SATOKO... BY HER-SELF... FOR THIS... RIDICULOUS SHOPPING ...?

...OF COURSE NOT. I...HATE LIQUOR AND TABACCO...

H-HEY, SATOKO... THIS... ISN'T ALL FOR YOUR DINNER TONIGHT... IS IT...?

BIKU (WINCE)

SATOKO!

GARA (RATTLE)

WHERE IS HE NOW...?

YOU STARTED TO HEAT THE SAKE AND LEFT WITHOUT TURNING OFF THE GAS, DUMBASS !!!

YOU IDIOT!!! I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO THAT GINJOU,* AND YOU RUINED IT!! MORON!

WOULD YOU BRING MY SNACKS IN HERE ALREADY !!?

*A KIND OF SAKE BREWED WITH LOW-TEMPERATURE FERMENTATION.

I'M SORRY ...

I'M SORRY...!

CHAPTER 7

...UNCLE...?

...IS SATOKO'S...

TET-CHAN, YOU'RE TOO ROUGH ON THE GIRL. BE A LITTLE NICER TO HER, WOULD YA? I FEEL SORRY FOR HER.

THAT MAN ...

ANYWAY, YOU JUST GOT TSUMO, TET-CHAN.

THIS IS JUST WHAT THAT DUMBASS NEEDS. SHE WAS LIKE THAT EVEN WHEN SHE LIVED WITH MY BROTHER. SHE WOULDN'T LISTEN TO A THING ANYONE SAID.

OH... SORRY, SORRY.. WHAT'S THIS, YOU GOT RICHI *AGAIN*, TSUBA-SA?

TSUBASA-SAN GOT RICHI.

NOTE: SEE PAGE 78 FOR AN EXPLANATION OF THESE MAHJONG TERMS

...I'VE BEEN TOLD TO MAKE DINNER FOR HIS FRIENDS TOO.

...MY UNCLE'S FRIENDS CAME FROM TOWN... ...THEY'RE PLAYING MAHJONG.

!

WHA ...

WHAT... THE...?

KANTOKU ...!!

...NOW, MAEBARA-SAN, YOU HELP TOO. HERE, YOU'RE A BOY, SO PLEASE TAKE THE HEAVY BAGS.

MAKING SATOKO... GO ON CRAZY SHOPPING TRIPS...

...WHILE HE... PLAYS MAH-JONG...?

WHILE HE... PLAYS...?

CAN WE REALLY JUST LET THIS GO!!? THIS IS DEFINITE-LY—

...I'LL GRAB THESE TWO... COME ON... YOU HELP TOO, MAEBARA-SAN.

...KH.

GU (TUG)

!

IT'S SO...

...HEAVY...

IT MUST BE HEAVY, KEIICHI-SAN...YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUSH YOURSELF...

ZA (STEP)

STUPID. DON'T UNDER-ESTIMATE ME.

GA-HA-HA, THERE IT IS! RON!!

GYA HA HA HA HA

.....

REALLY, THANK YOU SO MUCH. YOU'RE A BIG HELP.

YES... THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

I'M HAPPY... JUST TO HAVE YOU COME ALL THIS WAY...

...IF THERE'S ANY-THING... ANYTHING I CAN DO...I'LL HELP YOU ANY-TIME...

NOW... YOU'D BETTER GO...HE'S DRUNK RIGHT NOW...I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE MIGHT GET ANGRY AT...

!!?

I JUST HIT IT WHEN I FELL DOWN THE STAIRS, THAT'S ALL.

BA (SNATCH)

GUI (TUG)

HEY, SATOKO, WHAT'S THIS...!!?

TH-AT MAN...!

TH-

YOU'RE LYING ...!!

NO.

LOOKING CAREFULLY ...

HER WHOLE BODY IS.

...BUT RIGHT NOW, PUT UP WITH IT, MAEBARA-SAN!!

MMPH...

I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL. I DO...

!!

BA (SMACK)

PUT UP WITH IT...?

WHAT GOOD IS IT TO PUT UP WITH IT?

SHE TALKS AS IF SHE KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT ME!

GGHHGH!

AM I SO POWERLESS I CAN'T EVEN YELL?

KANA (CHIRP)

KANA

KANA

KANA

YOU LOOKED LIKE MY REAL NII-NII JUST NOW.

...MY REAL NII-NII ISN'T AROUND ANYMORE ...

PEKO (BOW)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, KEIICHI-SAN.

...BUT NOW I HAVE YOU FOR MY NII-NII, KEIICHI-SAN...

EH?

...I...

...WON'T RUN AWAY, OKAY...?

.....

I'LL NEVER... RUN AWAY... ...I WOULD NEVER RUN AWAY...AND ABANDON YOU LIKE SATOSHI DID!!!

I WON'T... ABANDON YOU!!!

...GOOD-BYE... NII-NII.

.....

IT'S OKAY...YOU WERE...NII-NII JUST NOW... AND THAT GAVE ME...LOTS AND LOTS...OF STRENGTH ...

I CAN KEEP TRYING...UNTIL TOMORROW...

SATOKO! WILL YOU GET THOSE SNACKS IN HERE ALREADY !?

NOW, NII-NII. HURRY AND GO. I'LL BE ALL RIGHT...

BUT...

GUI (TUG)

LET'S GO, MAEBARA-SAN. STAYING ANY LONGER WILL ONLY TROUBLE SATOKO.

...KH.

SATOKO...

BURORORORO (VRRRRROOM)

...SATO-SHI...

WHY IS SATOSHI GONE AT A CRITICAL TIME LIKE THIS...!!?

...THEY SAY IT'S SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE CURSE... BUT ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT HE RAN AWAY ...

BURORORO

THEY SAY THAT ONE DAY, HE JUST NEVER CAME BACK...

HE DIDN'T EVEN LEAVE A NOTE...

SATOSHI-KUN HAD BEEN WORK-ING STEADILY AT A PART-TIME JOB...AT THE TIME, SATOKO-CHAN WANTED A VERY BIG PLUSH TOY...THAT'S WHY...

EVERYONE SAID HE PROBABLY WANTED TO GIVE HIS SISTER WHAT LITTLE HE COULD IN THE WAY OF FINE PRESENTS SINCE SHE HAD THAT PITIFUL LIFE FORCED ON HER BY HER AUNT AND UNCLE.

...WASN'T USED FOR A PRESENT...

¥2 11

BOOK: BANK

IN THE END, THE MONEY HE SAVED UP...

.....

PLEASE THINK ABOUT IT...

EVEN-TUALLY, EVEN SA-TOKO-CHAN REALIZED THAT HER BROTHER HAD ABAN-DONED HER.

IT'S UP TO HIM IF HE WANTS TO USE THAT MONEY TO RUN AWAY!! BUT...

...HE DIDN'T HAVE TO LEAVE SATOKO BEHIND, DID HE!!!?

BUT SATOKO-CHAN WAS VERY STRONG.

OF COURSE, PART OF IT WAS THAT SHE HAD THE SUPPORT OF HER CLOSE FRIENDS ...

...BUT SHE WAS ABLE TO GET HER SMILE BACK.

SHE'S SURE SATOSHI-KUN WILL COME BACK.

AND WHEN HE DOES, SHE WANTS HIM TO SEE THAT SHE WON'T BE A BURDEN ANYMORE.

SHE'S MUCH MORE GROWN-UP THAN THE AVERAGE GUY!!

SHE'S MUCH MORE CAPABLE OF MAKING A LIVING...THAN THE LIKES OF ME...SHE CAN DO JUST ABOUT ANY-THING!!

SATOKO'S NOT A BURDEN!!

...HAVING HER TEACH HER ALL KINDS OF THINGS...

LIVING TOGETHER WITH RIKA-CHAN...

IT'S A HEART-RENDING STRAIN ...

...TO MAKE SURE SATOSHI-KUN CAN COME BACK AT ANY TIME...

THAT'S THE RESULT OF ALL HER EFFORT ...

...ON SATOKO-CHAN'S... BIRTHDAY.

THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING FESTIVAL LAST YEAR... HER AUNT WAS KILLED, AND HE LEFT A FEW DAYS AFTER...

...ABOUT WHEN DID SATOSHI RUN...?

DID SATOKO WAIT... EXCITEDLY ANTICIPATING...

...HER WONDERFUL PRESENT...

...AND THE LIFE, WITH JUST HER BROTHER, THAT WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN...?

DAN (BAM)

SATOSHI, YOU...

...STUPID, MORONIC JERK...!!!

...UNDER CHILD WELFARE LAWS...I UNDERSTAND THERE IS A WAY TO SEPARATE CHILDREN FROM THEIR PARENTS AS AN EMERGENCY MEASURE TO ENSURE THE CHILD'S SAFETY.

.....

THEN WE CAN SAVE SATOKO FROM HER UNCLE RIGHT AWAY!?

...ONLY...IF SATOKO-CHAN WISHES IT.

HUH? BUT THAT'S ...

SATOKO-CHAN... MIGHT THINK THAT...

...PUTTING UP WITH THE BULLYING IS A "TEST."

"I LEANED ON MY BROTHER SO MUCH THAT HE HATES ME NOW."

IT MIGHT BE THAT IT BECAME A BIT TRAUMATIC FOR HER IN THAT WAY.

SO SHE WANTS TO OVER-COME IT BY HERSELF, WITHOUT RELYING ON ANY-ONE'S HELP...

I THINK THAT'S HOW SHE THINKS OF IT.

...DO YOU KNOW THAT THE SITUATION WAS REPORTED TO THE CHILD CONSULTATION CENTER LAST YEAR?

...YES.

...SATOKO ...NEVER SAYS A WORD... ABOUT HOW HARD IT IS...

NOW THAT HE MENTIONS IT...

APPAR-ENTLY...SA-TOKO-CHAN MADE THE REPORT HERSELF.

EH...?

BECAUSE OF THAT, THE BULLYING ESCALATED EVEN FURTHER...

...AND SATOSHI'S BURDEN BECAME EVEN HEAVIER...

SHE WOULD THINK...

...THAT WAS HER FAULT TOO...

WHY!!?

BESIDES, THEY WOULD SEND HER TO AN ORPHANAGE FOR CUSTODY...IN OTHER WORDS, SHE WOULD HAVE TO MOVE.

SO SHE WOULD WANT TO BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY EVEN LESS...

...EVEN IF WE FILED A REPORT WITHOUT TELLING HER... SHE WOULD NEVER AC-KNOWLEDGE ANY ABUSE ...

...THAT'S PROBABLY WHY SATOKO-CHAN DOESN'T WANT TO FILE A REPORT.

BECAUSE SATOKO-CHAN'S "REASON FOR LIVING" IS WAITING IN THIS VILLAGE FOR SATOSHI-KUN TO COME BACK.

.....

A GIRL WHO WAS ABANDONED BY HER BROTHER AND WAS ALMOST AS GOOD AS AN INVALID ...

...FOUND HER REASON TO LIVE...

I DON'T UNDER-STAND IT.

PLEASE THINK OF IT FROM SATOKO'S POINT OF VIEW.

EH...?

...BUT I BELIEVE THAT THAT WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD TO SATOKO'S HAPPINESS.

...IF I FEEL THAT SATOKO IS REALLY IN TROUBLE ...

...I'LL REPORT IT, AND I WON'T ASK FOR ANYONE ELSE'S OPINION.

SATOKO MIGHT END UP HATING ME FOR IT...

...MAEBARA-SAN...

I'M...

...POWER-LESS...

BUT HOW ...

IT'S TRUE THERE ARE EXTRA ROOMS IN MY HOUSE ...

YOU LIVE IN SUCH A GRAND HOUSE; IS YOUR HOUSE THE ONLY ONE THAT DOESN'T COUNT?

WHAT WILL I SAY?

... CAN I CONVINCE MY PARENTS?

WHAT CAN I SAY? THERE'S JUST NO WAY...

DO I KEEP HER HERE WITHOUT TELLING MY PARENTS?

WHERE?

DO I HAVE THE MONEY?

WHAT ABOUT FOOD?

HOW WILL SHE LIVE?

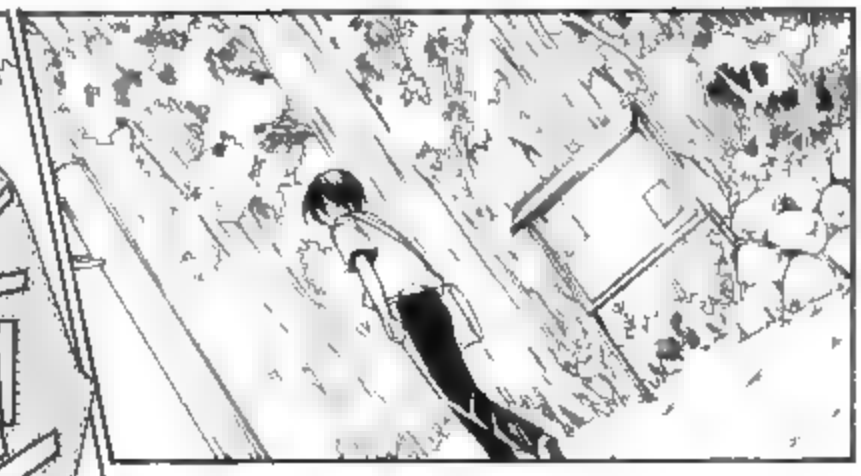
DAMN...

WHAT SHOULD I DO ...!?

DAMN!!

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

I DIDN'T COME UP WITH A SINGLE PLAN TO SOLVE ANYTHING... I DON'T... WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL LIKE THIS...



I'M JIROU TOMITAKE A FREE-LA... PHOTO... GR...

...OH.

COME TO HINA-ZAWA A FEW TIMES A YEAR TO TAKE PICTURES OF THE WILD BIRDS HERE

YOU'RE THAT PHOTOG-RAPHER ...

HEY, THERE ...

MAEBARA-KUN...WAS IT?

WOULD HE SHUT UP...?

YEAH... WELL...

THAT'S RIGHT. JIROU TOMITAKE. I'M GLAD YOU REMEM-BERED.

STILL, GOING TO SCHOOL AT THIS HOUR? YOU'RE REALLY LATE, YOU KNOW. AH-HA-HA.

IF YOU'RE NOT IN MUCH OF A HURRY... WOULD YOU MIND TELLING ME HOW TO GET TO FURUDE SHRINE?

I LEFT MY MAP AT THE HOTEL.

...I DON'T MIND.

IF YOU LIKE, I'LL TAKE YOU THERE. ...I'M NOT IN A HURRY AT ALL...

REALLY? THAT'D BE A BIG HELP!

JIROU-SAN, YOU'RE LATE.

HEY, SORRY, SORRY, TAKANO-SAN!

!

HUH? YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?

...SHE... TOOK CARE OF ME AT THE CLINIC ONCE...

OH...? YOU BROUGHT JIROU-SAN HERE FOR ME, MAEBARA-KUN?

IS TODAY A DAY OFF FROM SCHOOL?

FELLOW? DON'T BE SILLY!

ARE YOU...FELLOW PHOTOGRAPHERS? OH...IS THAT WHY YOU'RE MEETING EACH OTHER?

...A CAMERA CASE ...?

YOU COULD TAKE PHOTOS ALL ON YOUR OWN; YOU DON'T NEED MY GUIDANCE!

NN... NA-HA-HA! TH-THAT'S NOT TRUE! YOU'RE A FAST LEARNER, TAKANO-SAN.

I'M JUST AN AMATEUR; JIROU-SAN IS BEING KIND ENOUGH TO TEACH ME THE BASICS, IS ALL... RIGHT?

OH...THE FESTIVAL TO THANK HINAMIZAWA'S GUARDIAN DIETY, OYASHIRO-SAMA... RIGHT?

TOMORROW IS FINALLY THE COTTON DRIFTING. I HOPE I CAN GET SOME GOOD PICTURES THIS YEAR...

THE CURSE ...

EH... AH...

HEE-HEE... I WONDER WHAT WILL HAPPEN... THIS YEAR?

...BEARING THE BRUNT OF IT...?

SO... OYASHIRO-SAMA BRINGS A CURSE DOWN ON THE VILLAGE'S ENEMIES...? IF IT WERE TO HAPPEN THIS YEAR... WHO WILL END UP...

OH, COME ON, TAKANO-SAN.

OH, REALLY?

THEY SAY THAT OYASHIRO-SAMA HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY HARD ON OUTSIDERS THESE PAST FEW YEARS.

AH! I VISIT THE SHRINE EVERY TIME I COME HERE!!

IT'S CERTAINLY NOT GONNA BE ME!

HE MAY HAVE JUST MOVED HERE...BUT MAEBARA-KUN IS DEFINITELY A VILLAGER; HE LIVES IN HINAMI-ZAWA...

...BUT YOU'RE JUST AN OUTSIDER, JIROU-SAN.

NOW THEN, WILL OYASHIRO-SAMA LET YOU GET AWAY THIS YEAR...?

Y-YOU'RE CRUEL.

AH HA HA HA

...NO... SATOKO'S PARENTS AND HER AUNT WERE KILLED BY THE CURSE ...

...SO I WAS WONDERING IF HER UNCLE WOULD BE NEXT IN LINE.

...HAVE YOU HEARD THAT SATOKO'S... SATOKO HOJO'S UNCLE IS BACK?

...EH?

...HMM, THAT'S AN INTERESTING THEORY. IT'S TRUE THAT, LOOKING AT THE PAST VICTIMS, THERE ARE A LOT OF HOJOS.

THINKING ABOUT IT THAT WAY... YOU CAN'T DENY THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE UNCLE WOULD EITHER DIE OR DISAPPEAR THIS YEAR...

ニヤニヤ

SFX: KUSU (SNICKER) KUSU

TEE HEE HEE HEE

I'M SORRY. BUT OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE IS MY LIFE'S WORK...

UGH...IT'S NOT GOOD TO LAUGH AT POSSIBLE MISFORTUNE.

HE'S THE KIND OF GUY WHO RAN FROM THE VILLAGE... BECAUSE HE WAS SCARED AFTER HIS WIFE SUFFERED A CRUEL DEATH LAST YEAR.

...IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, OYASHIRO-SAMA WON'T FORGIVE PEOPLE WHO ABANDON THE VILLAGE AND RUN AWAY... RIGHT?

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT HER UNCLE WILL MEET WITH THE CURSE?

TAKANO-SAN...YOU KNOW A LOT ABOUT THE CURSE, DON'T YOU...?

BE HONEST— WHAT DO YOU THINK?

OH... WHAT'S THIS?

IT'S LIKE YOU WANT TO KILL HER UNCLE SO BADLY YOU CAN'T STAND IT...

DO YOU KNOW SANTA CLAUS'S TRUE IDENTITY?

MAE-BARA-KUN...

EH?

IT... IT'S NOT THAT...

O-OH, THAT'S WHAT YOU MEANT... WELL, YEAH.

THE TRUE IDENTITY OF ANYTHING IS ULTIMATELY HUMAN.

WHAT? YOU *DON'T* KNOW?

...IT'S DADDY. THE DADDY IN EVERYONE'S HOUSE.

...SO, MAEBARA-KUN, LET ME ASK YOU AGAIN.

YES, THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT. EVERY PHENOMENON THAT HAPPENS IN THE HUMAN WORLD IS CAUSED BY PEOPLE FOR THEIR OWN CONVENIENCE.

DO YOU KNOW THE TRUE IDENTITY...OF OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE?

NOT ABOUT SANTA CLAUS THIS TIME...BUT OYASHIRO-SAMA.

MAE-BARA-KUN, WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT DOESN'T LEAVE HERE. TAKANO-SAN...

AND YOU SAID YOURSELF, REMEMBER? THE TRUE IDENTITY OF ANY-THING IS ULTIMATELY HUMAN.

MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW. THIS IS A WORLD WHERE THERE ARE ONLY HUMANS.

.....

...AS A SERIES OF MURDERS COMMITTED BY PEOPLE, CARRIED OUT BY THE RESIDENTS OF HINAMIZAWA BASED ON SOME RITUAL.

...SEES THE SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS DEATHS REVOLVING AROUND OYASHIRO-SAMA...

I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO INTEREST IN WHO THE KILLERS ARE.

MY LIFE'S WORK IS RESEARCHING THE DOCTRINES AND IDEOLOGIES BEHIND IT FROM AN ETHNOLOGI-CAL POINT OF VIEW.

DON'T MISUNDER-STAND.

...WHA ...?

...WELL, OF COURSE. I HAVE A GUESS LIKE, OH, THE PEOPLE AROUND THERE ARE PROBABLY INVOLVED.

IF YOU STUDY THE HISTORY OF ONIGAFUCHI, THERE'S A CONCLUSION YOU'LL INEVITABLY COME TO...

...TAKANO-SAN...COULD IT BE...EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE PROOF ...

...YOU HAVE A GUESS...AS TO WHO THE MURDERERS ARE...?

.....

THEN...

...WHO IS IT...?

...TO KNOW THAT?

WHAT GOOD...

...WILL IT DO ME...

...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW YOURSELF, TAKANO-SAN...

YOU BRAG AND ACT LIKE YOU'RE SO SMART...

IRA (IRK)

I WONDER... WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH THAT INFORMATION? IF YOU FIND OUT, SOME DANGER MIGHT BEFALL YOU TOO.

THE FIFTH YEAR'S CURSE... MIGHT FALL ON YOU...

I DON'T HATE PEOPLE LIKE THAT...

YOU'RE JUST A BOY, BUT YOU CAN PROVOKE PEOPLE...? YOU'RE MORE SAVAGE THAN YOU LOOK...

OH... YOU DON'T MINCE WORDS ...

SFX: KUSU (SNICKER)

...BUT BEFORE I DO, YOU HAVE TO SWEAR TO ME THREE THINGS...

ALL RIGHT.

I CAN TELL YOU.

WHAT AM I DOING...

...ASKING THIS...?

YOU WON'T REGRET IT. YOU WON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE. AND YOU ABSOLUTELY WILL NOT

...I...I SWEAR.

...TELL ANYONE THAT I TOLD YOU.

NN-HN-HN!! THERE IT IS, RON.

THREE CHUN-DORA, A FULL 1,500.

EEHH? WHAT IS THIS? HOW'D YOU GET THREE DORAS?

IDIOT! YOU KNEW OOISHI WAS F-SHING, AND YOU PUT AN-OTHER KANDORA IN THE PILE! YOU BROUGHT THIS ON YOUR-SELF!

JARA (RATTLE)

BY THE WAY, OOISHI-SAN. HOW'S IT GOING? YOU CRACK THE CASE YET?

WHAT? OH, THE SLAUGHTERED CORPSE THEY FOUND IN THE GUTTER?

JARA

RINA MAMIYA. REAL NAME, RITSUKO.

SHE WORKED AT A CABARET CLUB CALLED BLUE MERMAID ON FLOWER ROAD IN SHISHI-BONE.

GOOD GRIEF, THAT'S A DANGEROUS PLACE TO BE WORKING. ISN'T THAT PLACE RUN BY THE YOUNG BOSS FROM THE SONOZAKI FAMILY?

...SONO-ZAKI...OH! IS THIS RELATED TO CASE "S"?

...THAT WILL BE A TOUGH MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB.

NN-HN-HN! HE'S PROBABLY ALREADY DEAD; WE JUST HAVEN'T FOUND THE BODY.

IF A WOMAN'S MESSING WITH EXTORTION, THERE MUST BE A MAN BEHIND IT.

APPARENTLY SHE WAS IN PRETTY DEEP.

ACCORDING TO RUMOR, OUR DEARLY DEPARTED HAD A HAND IN EXTORTION AND DRUGS.

...SO HE'S ALIVE?

..THIS SMELLS MORE AND MORE LIKE CASE "S."

...HOJO? OH, THE HUSBAND OF THE DECEASED FROM LAST YEAR'S CASE, THE HINAMIZAWA HOUSEWIFE WHO WAS BEATEN TO DEATH...

AND HE'S... TEPPEI HOJO.

NO, APPARENTLY HE'S STILL ALIVE.

THE PESTS EXTERMINATE THE PESTS... IT'S TRULY A REMARKABLE SELF-PURIFICATION SYSTEM.

THEN HE'LL PROBABLY DIE SOON...

CHAPTER 8

IT STINKS, I WAS TOLD.

THE FOOD STINKS, I WAS TOLD.

IT STINKS BECAUSE I STINK,

I WAS TOLD.

I STINK BECAUSE I HAVEN'T BATHED,

I WAS TOLD.

YOU'RE A STINKY PERSON,

SO TAKE A BATH THREE TIMES A DAY, I WAS TOLD.

AND WHEN I TAKE ONE BATH, I HAVE TO STAY IN

A LONG, LONG TIME, I WAS TOLD.

CHAPTER 8

MAHJONG NOTES

Pg. 42, 44, 73

Mah ong s p ayed w th a set of i ustrated t les There are three su ts ranked from one to n ne stones, bamboo, and characters as wel as two sets of honor t es the fou wind d rections and three dragon tiles. Similar to rummy the objec s to arrange one's "hand" of tiles w th sets of matching tiles or numer c seq ences For example, Ooishi's **chundora** means he's collected three chundora, or red dragon, t es On a p ayer's turn, he or she draws one tile and adds it to the r hand, then discards on tile He or she may choose to draw either from the wall of t les (ike the deck n cards) or they may choose the most recent y d scarded t e If a player gets a winn ng hand by draw'ng his ast tile from the wal , it's **tsumo** if the f'na w'nn ng tile was drawn from the prev ously discarded t e, it's cal ed **ron**. **Riichi** means a player only needed one more tile to w'n

NOTE: VILLAGE CHIEF, NUMBER TWO

NOTE: BLACK

NOTE: FATHER ROUGH, OTHERS

WHEN I FINALLY REACHED THE SCHOOL AFTER WALKING THROUGH THE DISGUSTING HEAT AND THE UNCOMFORTABLE HUMIDITY, THE INFORMATION I GAINED...

KEI-CHAN!! WHAT ON EARTH IS THE MATTER ...?

EVERY-ONE WAS WORRIED WHEN YOU WEREN'T AT SCHOOL EITHER, KEIICHI-KUN!!

...WAS, AS USUAL, THE LAME EXCUSE THAT "SATOKO IS OUT AGAIN WITH A COLD TODAY," SO...

MAEBARA-KUN, CLASS REPRESENTATIVE. WHEN YOU'VE FIN SHED EATING LUNCH, PLEASE COME TO THE FACULTY ROOM.

.....

I'M POWERLESS...? NO, I CAN'T BE POWERLESS.

YESTERDAY... I WENT TO SEE THEM... SATOKO'S FAMILY'S HOUSE... AND HER UNCLE...

HER UNCLE'S ABUSE WAS WORSE THAN I IMAGINED. SATOKO'S BODY IS COVERED IN BRUISES...

I THINK THERE'S A TIME I NEED TO HELP SATOKO, REGARDLESS OF WHAT SHE WANTS. AND I THINK...IT MIGHT BE NOW.

I THINK WE HAVE TO TELL SENSEI. EVEN IF IT GOES AGAINST WHAT SATOKO WANTS.

...OF COURSE IT WILL ONLY BE AFTER WE MAKE SURE... THAT REPORTING IT TO THE AUTHORITIES WILL GET SATOKO TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.

...IT'S HARD...IT WOULD BE NICE IF WE *COULD* GET THAT CLEAR PROMISE WHILE TALKING TO SENSEI...

...I...

...THINK THAT IF KEIICHI HAS DECIDED THAT WE SHOULD TALK...THEN WE SHOULD.

KOKUN (NOD) コクン

ALL RIGHT...

...SO THE RUMORS GOING THROUGH CLASS...THAT HOJO-SAN IS BEING ABUSED... ARE TRUE?

...YES. YESTERDAY I SAW WHAT THINGS ARE LIKE OVER THERE WITH MY OWN EYES.

SIGN: FACULTY ROOM

職員室

I UNDERSTAND. THE PRINCIPAL AND I WILL FILE A REPORT TO THE PREFECTURAL CHILD CONSULTATION CENTER.

AS HER TEACHER... I THINK I CAN MANAGE SOME-THING.

...THIS IS CHIE FROM THE HINAMIZAWA BRANCH SCHOOL...I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO THE PRINCIPAL. IT'S URGENT... YES.

...KEI-CHAN. LET'S GO BACK?

YOU TWO MAY RETURN TO CLASS.

...YES.

...SHE "THINKS"? "MANAGE SOME-THING" ...?

GUH (CLENCH)

...YES, ACCORDING TO MY STUDENTS, IT'S WORTH CONSIDERING.

KEI-CHAN...!

DON'T BE SO IRRESPONSIBLE ABOUT THIS!! YOU DON'T "THINK"! YOU DON'T "MANAGE SOME-THING"!

IT HAS TO BE ABSOLUTE !!

IF THIS TURNS INTO ANOTHER "WAIT AND SEE," I WON'T LET IT END THERE!!

IT'S NOT "WORTH CONSIDER-ING"!! DO SOMETHING RIGHT NOW!!

FATE'S DIE...

...HAS BEEN CAST.

BUT I CAN'T RELAX YET. I CAN'T BE SO NAIVE AS TO SAY, "ALL WE CAN DO NOW IS PRAY."

...THERE'S ONE MORE PLACE WORTH ASKING FOR HELP.

...AND PASS THEM OFF AS A CURSE EVERY YEAR...

THE ONES I BELIEVE TO BE THE CRIMINALS CARRYING OUT THE PLAN TO CAUSE MYSTERIOUS DEATHS...

...MION.

CAN I... STOP BY YOUR HOUSE TODAY...?

EH...?

OKAY...

WELL, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME.

THANK YOU.

YOU EVEN HAVE HIRED HELP? YOU'RE RICH, ALL RIGHT...

BECAUSE BATCHA AND I LIVE HERE ALONE. I COULDN'T DO EVERYTHING MYSELF.

THIS IS REALLY SUDDEN, SO IT MIGHT SHOCK YOU, MION...BUT I WANT YOU TO LISTEN.

.....

.. SO WHAT S T YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ME ABOUT, KEI-CHAN ..?

EH...? WHAT...?

AH, FIRST I'LL GIVE YOU A WAY OUT OF IT.

...IF, FOR ARGUMENT'S SAKE, IT'S TRUE, THEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO ADMIT IT. BUT I WANT YOU TO HEAR ME OUT.

!!!

I WANT TO TALK TO THE NEXT IN LINE TO BE HEAD OF WHAT IS NOW THE FIRST OF THE THREE FAMILIES OF ONIGAFUCHI VILLAGE...MION SONOZAKI.

KARAN (CLATTER)

...I'M SURPRISED ENOUGH THAT YOU KNOW THE VILLAGE'S OLD NAME, "ONIGA-FUCHI" ...

...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE...YOU KNOW A LOT ABOUT ME THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUE...

.....

...WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT...?

YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE ABOUT ME, KEI-CHAN.

...SO I DON'T THINK I CAN GRANT ANY OF YOUR REQUESTS, OKAY...?

...IT MIGHT JUST BE THAT I'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA, BUT... BUT THAT'S OKAY. JUST LISTEN.

AND IF IT IS TRUE...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO TALK TO ME ABOUT, BUT BEFORE YOU DO, I'M GOING TO WARN YOU.

...BUT IF TALKING WILL LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD A LITTLE BIT, KEI-CHAN... I'LL LISTEN.

...SO IT WOULD SEEM.

...BUT THEY ALL HAVE JUST ONE THING IN COMMON...A BITTER ENEMY OF THE VILLAGE IS CHOSEN AS THE TARGET.

EVEN THOUGH EACH INDIVIDUAL CASE HAS BEEN SOLVED, IF YOU LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE, IT'S A BAFFLING SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS DEATHS AND DISAPPEAR-ANCES...

...OYA-SHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE. NO ONE KNOWS ITS TRUE IDENTITY, OR WHY IT HAPPENS ...

...THE VICTIMS FOR THIS YEAR'S CURSE...HAVE THEY ALREADY BEEN CHOSEN ...?

...IT'S THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, RIGHT? THE COTTON DRIFTING ...

.....

AH...I'M SORRY...I PROMISED ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS LISTEN... I SHOULDN'T BE ASKING QUESTIONS ...

.....

IF... THIS YEAR'S CURSE... ISN'T AIMED AT SATOKO'S UNCLE, THEN... PLEASE CHANGE IT TO HIM.

...I MEAN, LAST YEAR WAS SATOKO'S AUNT, RIGHT!? IF THEY'RE GOING IN ORDER, IT WOULDN'T BE WEIRD AT ALL, WOULD IT!!?

...I HEARD... THAT OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE... THAT IS...

...AH-HA-HA-HA-HA...THAT'S RIGHT...IT COULD GO IN ORDER LIKE THAT.

IT'S TRUE THAT EVERYONE WOULD UNDER-STAND IF HE DIED THIS YEAR...

I JUST—!! IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO CONTACT THE GUYS WHO DECIDE THAT STUFF... I WANT THEM TO CHOOSE HER UNCLE AS THE CURSE'S TARGET!!

I DON'T REALLY—!! I'M NOT REALLY INTERESTED IN WHETHER OR NOT YOU'RE INVOLVED OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT!!

!

THE "SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS DEATHS IN HINAMIZAWA ...ALSO KNOWN AS 'OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE' ARE INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE WHOLE VILLAGE, CAUSED BY THE THREE FAMILIES, WITH THE SONOZAKI FAMILY AT THE HEAD"... RIGHT...?

BUT!! I'M TELLING YOU!!

...THAT'S MEAN...

I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE THE MAIN OFFENDER IN THE SERIAL MURDERS OR IF YOU'RE COMPLETELY UNINVOLVED!! THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND! I DON'T CARE A BIT IF YOU ARE!!

IF THE POLICE COME AFTER YOU, I'LL HELP YOU OUT. I'LL MAKE AN ALIBI FOR YOU!! BECAUSE WE'RE BUDDIES, WE'RE BEST FRIENDS!! AREN'T WE!?

...YOU'RE MEAN, KEI-CHAN...IF THAT WERE TRUE...

...THAT WOULD MAKE ME THE MAIN OFFENDER, WOULDN'T IT...? YOU'RE CALLING ME A MURDERER, KEI-CHAN...

SU (STAND)

KEI-CHAN, I WANT TO START MAKING DINNER SOON, SO I'D LIKE TO LEAVE IT AT THIS FOR TODAY.

...SUDDENLY YOU'RE MY ACCOMPLICE!? ...HA-HA... THAT'S PRETTY BOLD, KEI-CHAN...

DON'T TURN THIS INTO A JOKE! I'M SERIOUSLY—

.....

...BUT I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL, SO MUCH THAT IT HURTS.

...IF I REALLY WAS... IN A POSITION TO CONTROL THE THREE FAMILIES AND CHOOSE A VICTIM EVERY YEAR...

...I WOULD GRANT YOUR WISH, KEI-CHAN.

BUT I'M NOT.

IT'S TRUE THAT THE SONOZAKI FAMILY CONTROLS HINAMIZAWA, AND THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF BAD RUMORS ABOUT US...

!! MION!

...BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE INCIDENTS.

KEI-CHAN, YOU CAN DREAM IF YOU WANT.

IF I NODDED FOR YOU RIGHT NOW, IT MIGHT TAKE THE LOAD OFF YOUR SHOULDERS ...

NO .. DON'T SAY THAT ...

AT LEAST RIGHT NOW, EVEN IF IT IS A LIE, YOU COULD JUST NOD FOR ME...

...BUT AS CRUEL AS IT IS, SATOKO'S UNCLE WILL MAKE IT THROUGH THE NIGHT THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW; HE'LL STILL BE THERE NEXT WEEK AND THE WEEK AFTER.

...BE READY... FOR THAT...

...I DON'T WANT YOU COMING AT ME ON THE DAY AFTER THE COTTON DRIFTING ASKING WHY I DIDN'T KILL HIM.

...I'M REALLY... REALLY SORRY... FOR SAYING SUCH CRAZY THINGS TODAY...YOU CAN PRETEND IT NEVER HAPPENED ...

...MION...

WELL... SEE YOU TOMOR-ROW...

BYE-BYE.

I'LL FORGET ABOUT IT...

YEAH...

I DID EVERYTHING I CAN DO.

SENSEI SHOULD HAVE CONTACTED THE CHILD CONSULTATION CENTER...

I WONDER IF THEY'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF DEALING WITH IT RIGHT NOW?

ZAA (WHOOSH)

I WONDER HOW SATOKO...

...IS DOING RIGHT NOW...

KEIICHI-KUN!! SATOKO-CHAN'S SHOES ARE HERE!!

TA (RUN) TA TA TA TA

REALLY!?

SATOKO!!

SATOKO!! WHERE'S SATOKO ...!?

GARA (RATTLE)

SATOKO... UM...A WELFARE OFFICER... CAME, RIGHT? ...HOW DID IT GO...?

HAA (HUFF)

HAA

IT'S TOO EARLY FOR YOU TO BE SO NOISY, KEIICHI-SAN!

BE A LITTLE QUIETER!

...IT WAS SENSEI. ANY-ONE WOULD WORRY WITH YOU BEING ABSENT SO MUCH.

WHOEVER CALLED THEM? HONESTLY... IT WAS QUITE THE COMMO-TION.

S-SO!? WHAT HAPPENED !!?

BOSO (WHISPER)

...BUT I SAID SO MANY TIMES THAT I WAS OKAY...

I GOT OVER MY COLD AND CAME BACK TO SCHOOL, THAT'S ALL.

NOTHING HAPPENED! HO-HO-HO!

...WHAT ABOUT... UM...WHAT ABOUT YOUR UNCLE ...?

...WHAT...

.....!?

...IS SATOKO... SAYING ...?

KEIICHI, COME HERE...

SA—

AND WE BOTH SAID WE WERE SORRY.

YES, WE ADMITTED THAT THERE WAS A MISUNDER-STANDING.

!!?

...SATOKO... SAID IT WAS NOTHING... AND SENT THE OFFICER HOME.

RIKA-CHAN!! WHAT'S GOING ON!!?

YES, IT'S JUST AS YOU SAY, MAEBARA-KUN...

!

WHY!!!? WHY...!!? CAN'T WELFARE OFFICERS TAKE HER INTO EMERGENCY CUSTODY REGARDLESS OF HOW SHE FEELS!?

NO MATTER HOW MUCH SATOKO DENIES IT, SHE IS TAKING ABUSE!!

IF THE CHILD WELFARE OFFICER CONCLUDES THAT IT'S AN EMERGENCY, THEY DO HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO TAKE THE CHILD INTO CUSTODY.

SENSEI ...

THEN THAT'S WEIRD! WHY DID THEY RESPECT SATOKO'S WISHES AND NOT TAKE HER INTO CUSTODY ...!?

...THE HEAD OF THE CHILD CONSULTATION CENTER CAME TO A DECISION AFTER CONSIDERING VARIOUS THINGS...

WHAT THE HELL !!!?

DIDN'T YOU SAY YESTERDAY THAT YOU'D MANAGE SOMETHING? WHAT'S GOING ON!!?

...THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF SATOKO BEING ABUSED.

...KEIICHI.

...ACTUALLY, THIS IS THE THIRD TIME...

...THE THIRD TIME...? *THIS* WAS?

SO YOU'RE SAYING THERE WAS ONE... BEFORE THE REPORT THAT WINTER TWO YEARS AGO ...?

...ACTUALLY... SATOKO'S FATHER, THE ONE WHO FELL AND DIED...

WASN'T SATOKO'S REAL FATHER, SIR.

EH...? RIKA-CHAN... WHAT ON EARTH... EH...?

.....?

...SATOKO'S MOTHER HAD RE-MARRIED, SIR.

SATOKO AND SATOSHI... WERE HIS STEPCHILDREN.

EH...? SO... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING...?

...AT SOME POINT, SHE STARTED PLAYING PRANKS...THEY GOT WORSE AND WORSE, SIR.

THE MEN KEPT APPEARING BESIDE THEIR MOTHER, ONE AFTER ANOTHER... AND THEN THEIR NEW FATHER.

SATOKO COULDN'T ADJUST TO THAT ENVI-RONMENT... AND...

SHE WOULD THROW FOOD... SHOPLIFT... BREAK GLASS...

...I WASN'T IN HINA-MIZAWA AT THE TIME...SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW, BUT...

...ACCORD-ING TO WHAT I HEARD ON THE PHONE ...

...SATOKO-CHAN...WAS TRYING TO FRAME HER STEPFATHER.

SHE MADE UP A FAKE STORY ABOUT ABUSE... AND CALLED TO REPORT THE ABUSE *HERSELF*.

!!!

IT WAS AN ACT OF SELF-DEFENSE... SO THAT SATOKO-CHAN'S MOTHER WOULDN'T BE TAKEN AWAY BY A MAN SHE DIDN'T KNOW...

...PLEASE DON'T THINK OF SATOKO-CHAN... AS A PROBLEM CHILD, OKAY ...?

...SO IT WOULD SEEM, SIR...

...SO... THAT'S WHY... THEY SAY "WAIT AND SEE"...?

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT SATOKO HOJO IS LYING, SO BE EXTRA CAREFUL, IS THAT IT!?

G-GIVE ME A BREAK! THE PAST HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS!! ISN'T THE TRUTH THAT'S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT!?

SATOKO'S UNCLE IS ABUSING HER...

WHY DOES THAT FACT HAVE TO BE TWISTED AROUND BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST!!?

SATOKO IS STILL TRYING HER BEST... LET'S WATCH OVER HER... A LITTLE LONGER...

THE PERSON FROM THE CENTER SAID THAT THEY WOULD KEEP VISITING REGULARLY... IF IT GETS BAD, THEY'LL COME TO HELP...

...KEIICHI...

GAKU (COLLAPSE)

...YOU MEAN... ***AFTER*** IT GETS BAD.

...WILL ANYTHING I DO...

...BE UNWANTED HELP...?

...AND JUST WATCH OVER HER...!?

...THEN SHOULD I DO AS RIKA-CHAN SAYS...

IF SATOKO REALLY CAN STILL ENDURE IT...

RIRIIIIN

RIRIIIIN (RRRRRING)

AH-HA-HA-HA! IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE ALL FIVE OF US HAVE HAD LUNCH TOGETHER!

GATA (CLATTER)

NOW THEN!! IT'S TIME FOR LUNCH!!

Mew! ☆

GATA

KEIICHI-SAN'S KARA-AGE*...

KIRAN (GLINT)

*KARA-AGE IS A GENERAL TERM FOR FRIED FOOD—POTATOES, CHICKEN, ETC. SATOKO'S TOO QUICK FOR US TO SEE WHAT KEIICHI'S IS!

IT'S LEFTOVERS FROM YESTERDAY, THOUGH. THE STEWED DISHES LOOK NICE, DON'T THEY?

WOW, YOUR LUNCH IS AS LUXURIOUS AS EVER, MII-CHAN!!

COME ON, COME ON!! YOU TOO, KEI-CHAN! BRING YOUR DESK OVER HERE NOW!

Y-YEAH...

OH HO HO

YOU WERE WIDE OPEN! OH-HO-HO! IT'S DELICIOUS!

...IT REALLY HAS BEEN A LONG TIME... SINCE WE'VE ARGUED LIKE THIS...

...SATOKOOO!!

PAKU (CHOMP)

...IS MINE!

NWAH!?

HYOI (YOINK)

WASHA (RUFFLE)

...I GUESS... THAT'S ALL RIGHT...

MAYBE HE'LL EASE UP ON HER NOW... IF HIS TREATMENT OF HER IMPROVES A LITTLE...

...IN THE END... THEY DECIDED TO WAIT AND SEE... BUT EVEN HER UNCLE... MIGHT FEEL A LITTLE SORRY FOR GOING TOO FAR...

BASHIN (WHAP)

GASHAN (CRASH)

KORO (ROLL)

コロン..

KORO

HER HAND'S...

JIN (STING)

=/-/..

...BRUISED ...?

...EH...?

BARI
BARI
HUFF
HUFF
BARI
HUFF
BARI
BARI (SCRATCH)
BARI
...
SATOKO...
CHAN...?
WH-
WHAT'S
THE
MATTER
?
HUFF
BARI
D-DID
YOU...
ALWAYS
HATE...ME
RUFFLING
YOUR HAIR
...?
...
SATOKO...?
WHAT'S
WRONG...?
HUFF
BIKU
(WINCE)
SO
(SOFT)

KYAAAA!

GATA

GATA (CLATTER)

DON (WHAM)

HYAAAAAAAA!

MMPH...

YORO (STAGGER)

GUEEEEEH

GOBO

GOBO (VOMIT)

GATAAAAN (CLLLLATTER)

BASHA (SPLATTER)

YORO (STAGGER)

ZAWA (MURMUR)

...SATO... KO...

BISHA (SPLATTER)

BLEEEOOOH

BESHA (SPLATTER)

ARE... ARE YOU... ...OKAY...?

ZUKU (TWITCH)

NOOOO!

YORO

KYAAA!

DON (WHAM)

WAHH!

GATAAAAN (CLLLLATTER)

NOOOOO!

GASHAN (CRASH)

BUN (WHAM)

AAAAH!

KYAAA!

WAAAH!

JUST A...

STOP IT, SATOKO... WHAT'S WRONG ...!?

GASHAN

HUFF

YORO

!?

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

YORO

HUFF

SHIN (SILENCE)

!

HUFF

N-
NO...

...WHAT
ABOUT
YOU...?
ARE YOU
OKAY...?

AH...
I...

I'M...
SORRY

I'M
SORRY.

I'M
SORRY,
I'M
SORRY.

I-I...
I'M
SORRY.

SATOKO...
IT'S ME...
IT'S
KEIICHI!!
CAN'T YOU
TELL?

I
WON'T
DO ANY-
THING
TO HURT
YOU!!

IT
WASN'T,
IT WASN'T..
I CAN'T
TAKE
ANYMORE,
PLEASE
FORGIVE
ME.....

I SAID,
I SAID!!
I DON'T
KNOW,
I DON'T
KNOW!!

...SA-
TOKO...
YOU...

...WHAT
HAPPENED
...?

NOOOOO!

GATA (SHAKE)

GATA

HA HA HA

HELP, HELP, I'M SCARED, NO!

I SAID CALM DOWN!! IT'S OKAY!! I'M ON YOUR SIDE...!!!

NO NO NO NO! ...I CAN'T TAKE ANY-MORE... UAAAHHH... NNNGH... N...NII-NII...

GATA

GATA

BORO (CRY)

BORO

NII-NII...!! NII-NII!! HELP!! HELP MEEEEE!

I'M SORRY, KEIICHI-KUN. GET BACK.

GUI (PUSH)

WAAAAHH!

TELL US WHAT HAPPENED ...?

NO NO NO NO... NII-NII!! NII-NII!!

COME ON... RELAX ...

IT'S OKAY, SATOKO-CHAN...THERE'S NOTHING HERE TO SCARE YOU ANYMORE...!

...WHAT'S GOING ON...?

WHAT THE HELL... IS GOING ON...?

.....

HEY... MION...!!

WEREN'T WE... GOING TO GO BACK TO OUR NORMAL LIVES... STARTING TODAY ...?

WASN'T IT ALL SUP-POSED TO BE OVER YESTER-DAY ...!?

BASHAAAAAAN (CRAAAAAASH)

SHIN (SILENCE)

PARA (PATTER)

KORO

KORO (ROLL)

BOOK: JAPANESE DICTIONARY

...RENA... WHAT'S WRONG ...?

I'M SORRY, KEIICHI-KUN...BE QUIET A MINUTE ...

...WHAT WAS THAT JUST NOW...? WHAT'S WRONG !?

DID YOU GET ANYTHING FROM SATOKO!? WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

SHUT UP!!

I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO BE QUIET!!?

NO NO NO NO...NO MORE, NO NO NO...

GATA (SHAKE)

GATA

GATA

GATA

GYU (SQUEEZE)

HIKKU (HIC)

HIKKU

.....

NNGH... SATO... KO... CHAN...

FORGIVE US...

FOR-GIVE US...

FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO DO ANY-THING...

"FORGIVE US FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO DO ANYTHING."

I...

...WAS MAKING...

...A BIG MISTAKE...

...BEFORE SHE ENDED UP LIKE THIS.

SHE NEEDED TO BE SAVED.

...BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE...

...I COULD SAVE SATOKO ...

I THOUGHT...

GAKUN (COLLAPE)

WHOSE FAULT IS THIS ...?

GARA (RATTLE)

...WH-WHAT'S ALL THE NOISE ABOUT ...!!?

BAH (JUMP)

!!!

GARA

IT'S OUR FAULT ...!!

IT TURNED INTO A BIG RIOT OVER LUNCH... SEE?

HO-HO-HO-HO-HO-HO! I JUST...GOT IN A LITTLE FIGHT WITH RENA-SAN, THAT'S ALL!

HO HO...

GOSHI (WIDE)

GOSHI

...YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT ANY-I MORE.

SO...

REALITY ISN'T SO KIND AS TO HAVE YOUR NII-NII... CONVENIENTLY SHOW UP HERE TO SAVE YOU.

YOU'LL PROBABLY FOOL EVERYONE LIKE THAT...

WHAT FOR...!?

HAVING YOUR HEART TORN TO PIECES...

WHAT FOR !!?

YOU CAN CRY AND ASK FOR HELP... AND RUN AWAY!!!

SHIN (SILENCE)

YOU ALL GET SCARED TOO EASILY. OH-HO-HO-HO...

OH-HO-HO...IT WAS JUST A LITTLE MISCHIEF... THAT'S ALL!

WE'RE ...

...POWER LESS...!!

BOKUN BADUM

POWERLESS.

YOU ALL CAN CURSE YOUR POWERLESSNESS FOREVER.

I'M NOT POWERLESS.

I KNEW THAT THERE WAS A SIMPLER WAY TO SAVE SATOKO...

ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣ ಪಠ್ಯ ಇಲ್ಲಿಗೆ ಮುಗಿಯಿತು.
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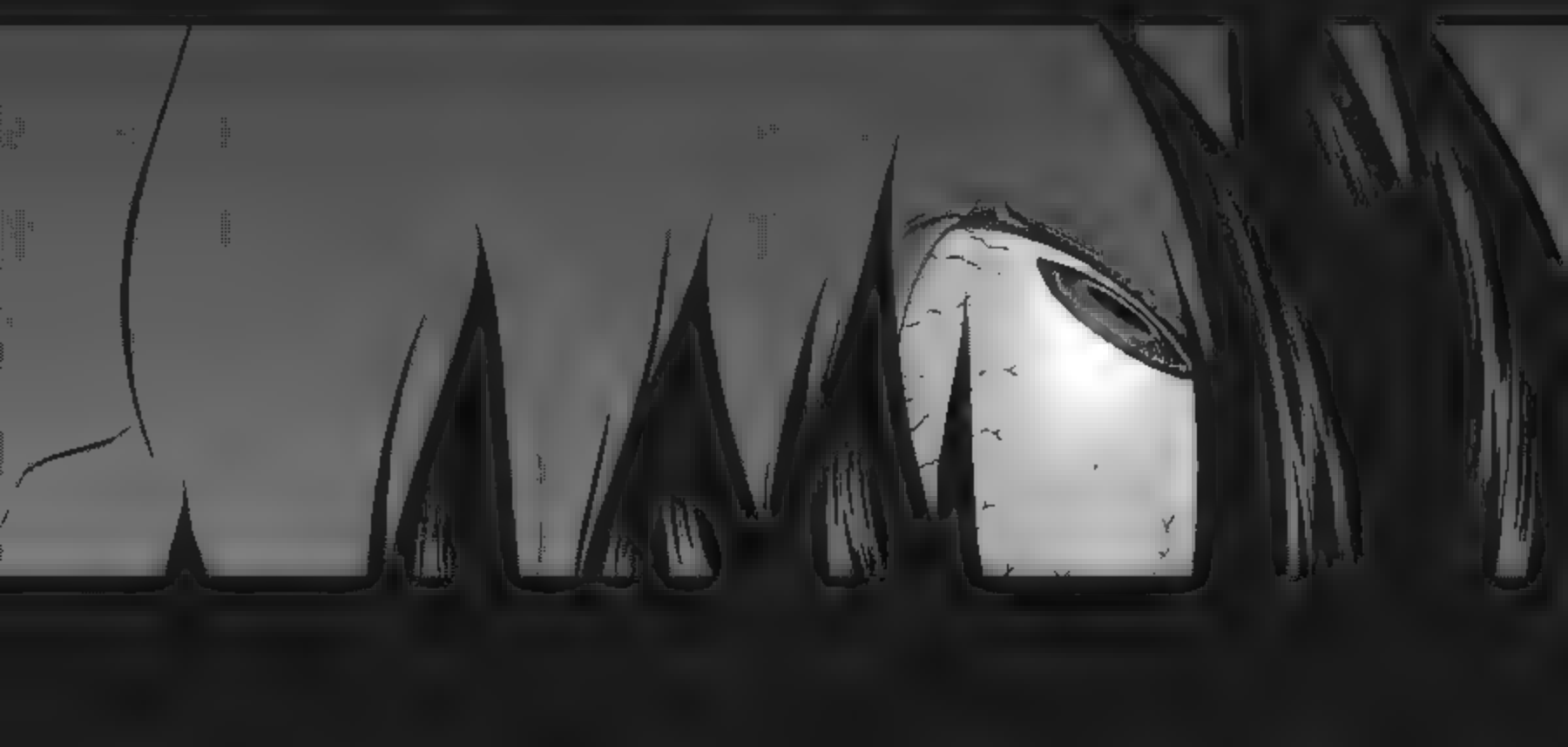

CHAPTER 9

MMMMN (HUMMMM)

MIN

MIN

MIN

MIN

...KUN.

KEIICHI-KUN!

...PASSED...OUT...?

...KEI-CHAN...!

I...

K-KEI-CHAN, ARE YOU OKAY!? IT LOOKED LIKE... YOU WERE HAVING A NIGHTMARE ...

YOU DIDN'T HIT YOUR HEAD OR SOMETHING, DID YOU?

BIKU (WINCE)

!!

SHUT UP. STOP MAKING SO MUCH NOISE. YOUR VOICES ARE SO SHRILL.

YOU ARE...KEIICHI MAEBARA-KUN, RIGHT...?

...KEIICHI... KUN?

WHAT...

...IS RENA SAYING?

RIRIIIIN (RRRRRRRRING)

RIIIIIN

...KEI-CHAN! WE'RE GOING TO GO HELP THEM GET READY FOR THE COTTON DRIFTING BEFORE WE GO HOME. WANNA COME?

I'M GONNA GO ON HOME.

NO...

THE SERIES OF PERFECT CRIMES OYASHIRO-SAMA HAS ACCUMU-LATED OVER FOUR YEARS ...

KYU (SQUEAK)

I'LL ADD MY CRIME TO IT.

SHAAAAAAAA (SHHHHH)

EH...?

...IT'S ESSENTIAL THAT I BE COOLER THAN ICE.

TO CARRY OUT THIS PLAN...

KYU (TUG)

...PERFECT CRIMES?

OF ALL THE MYSTERY NOVELS I'VE READ, YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU WHICH WERE THE BEST EXECUTED...

...OH, COME ON, KEIICHI. IF THEY WERE LIKE THAT...THEY WOULDN'T BE MYSTERY NOVELS.

...I DON'T NEED THE BOOK TITLES...WILL YOU JUST TELL ME THE TRICKS? TO THE PERFECT CRIMES...THAT NO ONE COULD SOLVE.

LET'S SEE. IT'S NOT QUITE A PERFECT CRIME, BUT CHRISTIE'S *AND THEN THERE WERE NONE* LEFT QUITE AN IMPRESSION. OH, THE TRICK IN *ORIENT EXPRESS* TOO.

YEAH... YOU LIKE THAT KIND OF STUFF, RIGHT?

MYSTERIES ARE ALL ABOUT ENJOYING THE PROCESS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER FACES THE INCIDENT AND SOLVES A CRIME THAT SEEMED PERFECT.

IF THE CRIME IS UNSOLVABLE, IT WOULDN'T MAKE A MYSTERY NOVEL.

HMM. SO...

"THE PART OF A MYSTERY... AT ITS BEGINNING...

"...WHERE THE INCIDENT IS DISCOVERED. IF THAT NEVER HAPPENED, I SUPPOSE THAT WOULD BE THE ULTIMATE PERFECT CRIME."

YES. WHAT A PERFECT CRIME NEEDS ...

...ISN'T AN IN-TRICATE TRICK... WHAT IT NEEDS...

...IS NOT TO BE DISCOVERED.

GARA (RATTLE)

...IS THE FORBIDDEN LOCKER.

KI (CREEEAK)

LOCKER: HOJO

YES. THIS...

AT FIRST, I WONDERED WHY SATOKO WAS THE ONLY ONE WITH TWO LOCKERS.

SATOSHI'S... LOCKER.

SU (LIFT)

I'LL ACT IN YOUR PLACE, COWARD.

AND DO IT FOR YOU.

SATOSHI... I'M GIVING YOU... ONE LAST CHANCE TO SAVE YOUR SISTER.

REACH, POWER, MOBILITY... NO ONE WOULD OBJECT TO SEEING ME TAKE IT ANY-WHERE.

NEXT...

ALL RIGHT...THE WEAPON IS TAKEN CARE OF...

HERE... SENSEI IS ALWAYS STERNLY WARNING US NOT TO COME NEAR HERE... SO IT SHOULD BE SAFE.

GOTO (CLUNK)

SIGN: ONIGAFUCHI SWAMP/ GOOD CHILDREN DON'T PLAY IN SWAMPS!

鬼ヶ淵沼
よいこは絶対
遊ばない！

HOW TO DISPOSE OF THE BODY...

"...I'LL SINK THE BAT I USED TO KILL HIM... AND THE BIKE EVERYONE BELIEVES HER UNCLE USES HERE.

ACCORDING TO VILLAGE LEGEND, THIS SWAMP... ONIGAFUCHI SWAMP, IS BOTTOMLESS.

...THIS FOREST...

KI (SCREE)

EVERY TIME YOU GO FROM SATOKO'S HOUSE TO THE CENTER OF TOWN...

...YOU ALWAYS PASS BY...

AS FOR THE BODY ...

...JUST IN CASE THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENS ...

...I WON'T USE THE SWAMP...

AND HERE...

I'LL LURE HER UNCLE OUT WITH A PHONE CALL.

...I'LL KILL HIM.

TORURURURURURU
(BRRRRRRRRRRRRING)

TORURURURURURU

ALL I HAVE TO DO NOW...

I GUESS THIS IS THE EXTENT...

...I CAN'T LET MY PARENTS SUSPECT ME!

...OF WHAT I CAN DO... TODAY.

IT'S ME. KEIICHI.

Eh...? With whom am I speaking?

O-ohhhh, Kei-chan!! What is it? Calling at this hour...

GACHA (CLICK)

Sonozaki residence.

AH... SORRY TO CALL YOU SO LATE AT NIGHT.

...IS THIS MION?

...IT'S ABOUT SATOKO...

.....

SHE'S...BEEN THROUGH A LOT, YOU KNOW? SO I WANT YOU TO TAKE HER TO THE FESTIVAL TOMORROW.

...SURE, BUT... WHY...?

...."WHY"...? DON'T YOU WANT TO GIVE HER A BREAK FOR TOMORROW AT LEAST...?

So why...?

Why don't you take her, Sa— I mean, Kei-chan? Why do you have to ask me?

...MION...?

Some-thing you need to do...?

...IT'S NOTHING BIG... I DON'T THINK IT'LL TAKE ANY TIME TO TAKE CARE OF, BUT... THERE'S A CHANCE I WON'T BE ABLE TO MEET UP WITH ALL OF YOU TOMORROW ...

SO, MION ...

I...UM... ACTUALLY, TOMORROW... I KIND OF... HAVE SOME-THING I NEED TO DO...

I CAN'T... GO TO THE FESTIVAL.

-Hic-

...No...
-Hic-

!?

I... THOUGHT I TOLD YOU... I DON'T WANT TO...

I DON'T WANT...TO HAVE THIS... FORCED ON ME... HIC!

I-I'M NOT...

...TRYING TO PUSH ANYTHING ON YOU...

JUST FOR TOMORROW NIGHT.

!!?

YOU LIED TO ME!!

IS SHE TALKING TO SOME-ONE...

...OTHER THAN ME...?

I'VE... NEGLECTED HER...THIS WHOLE TIME...

BECAUSE... I... HAVEN'T KEPT...MY PROMISE TO YOU AT ALL...

AH-HA! AH-HA-HA-HA BUT... I GUESS WE'RE EVEN...

YOU SAID...IT WAS JUST FOR THE COTTON DRIFTING... HIC...BUT IT ENDED UP... BEING... FOREVER ...

LIAR... HIC...

...MION...? WHAT THE HECK... IS SHE TALKING ABOUT?

HEY... THIS IS...

...SATOSHI-KUN...ISN'T IT?

...YOU NEVER CAME BACK... AFTER THAT...

AND YOU CALLED AGAIN...JUST TO FORCE HER...ON ME ONE MORE TIME...

...I got a phone call just like this one...a long time ago...

Ah... Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! S-sorry, it's noth-ing.

HA (GASP)

...MION?

WHAT HAVE YOU...BEEN TALKING ABOUT?

...SO SATOSHI... DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL... AND CALLED YOU LIKE THIS...

...I'M SORRY... WE JUST HAD... THE VILLAGE OFFICIALS HERE TODAY...I HAD A LITTLE BIT OF SAKE...MAYBE I'M DRUNK... AH-HA-HA...

GOSHI (WIPE)

GOSHI

WAIT...

.....

...Yes. He said he had something he needed to do and couldn't go himself.

...He asked me to take Satoko to the festival in his place.

SATOSHI MADE THE SAME PHONE CALL...

...AND SATOSHI... DISAPPEARED A FEW DAYS LATER.

...IT WAS... SATOSHI...

COULD IT BE?

IF HE MADE THE SAME PHONE CALL...

...IN THE TRUEST SENSE...

NO.

SATOSHI ...

...LAST YEAR, SATOKO WAS BEING BULLIED ALL THE TIME BY THEIR AUNT AND UNCLE.

...THEIR AUNT BULLIED SATOKO THE MOST...

...AND HE BURIED HER.. ON THE NIGHT HE COULD CLAIM IT WAS OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE...

...LAST YEAR, SATOKO'S AUNT WAS BEATEN TO DEATH, RIGHT...? DID THEY ...

...THINK SATOSHI WAS THE KILLER...?

BUT THE AUNT'S BODY WAS FOUND...

...AND SATOSHI WAS CORNERED BY THE POLICE...

...SO HE USED THE MONEY HE HAD SAVED UP FOR HIS SISTER...

...AND RAN...

...ACTUALLY, I SUSPECTED HIM TOO...THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE WAS ALL THERE, JUST LIKE YOU'RE SAYING, BUT...

I think your reasoning is wrong...

They say some guy who was crazy with drugs that they caught somewhere in the prefecture confessed to the crime...

OH YEAH... THIS CASE HAS BEEN SOLVED...

He was just some random lunatic... He didn't have any connection to Hinami-zawa.

Of course he didn't have any connection to Satoshi either...

So there's no reason for him to sacrifice himself and lie for Satoshi...

Besides ...

...I DON'T THINK SATOSHI HAD THE FUNDS TO RUN AWAY. THE DAY SATOSHI WITH-DREW HIS SAVINGS ...

...I CAN'T GET ANYONE TO BELIEVE THIS, BUT...

...the doll he said he wanted to buy for Satoko... had been sold. It was gone.

!?

WAIT A SECOND...IF HE BOUGHT THE DOLL, WOULDN'T HE HAVE GONE BACK TO SATOKO...?

FOR HIM TO BUY IT AND THEN VANISH INTO THIN AIR WITHOUT EVEN GIVING IT TO HER...IT'S UNTHINK-ABLE.

...Yeah... that's why it doesn't make sense.

I even... have her uncle's permission!

ZAAA (WHOOOSH)

Ah-ha-ha-ha... I'm sorry. We got off track somewere... Satoko, right? Don't worry! Actually, I've already invited her!

.....

Oh, no. *I'm* sorry. It's out of character for me to get upset like that...

...SORRY... I GUESS I DIDN'T HAVE TO CALL...

EH...!? REALLY ...?

...Yeah... Good night...

...GOOD NIGHT.

WELL...I GUESS I'LL BE HANGING UP NOW.

...SINCE THE MOMENT I CHOSE HIS BAT AS MY WEAPON.

...MIGHT HAVE BEEN WITH SATOSHI ...

I...

CHIN (DING)

...WERE YOU... REALLY A COWARD ...!?

OR...

...SATOSHI HAS BEEN LIVING INSIDE ME.

...SINCE THE MOMENT I DECIDED TO BECOME NII-NII...

...NO...

...ARE YOU EVEN NOW THE NII-NII WORTHY...

...OF SATOKO'S LOVE AND RESPECT...?

—THE DAY OF THE COTTON DRIFTING—

BON (BOOM)

BON

...THAT I DIDN'T RUN INTO ANYONE... ON MY WAY HERE...

IT'S LUCKY...

ZAKU (SHOVEL)

ALL RIGHT...

KASHAN (CLANK)

ZAKU

HUFF

ZAKU

HUFF

ZAKU

ZAKU
HUFF
ZAKU
ZAKU
HUFF
ZAKU
HUFF
ZAKU
(SHOVEL)
HUFF
I'VE DUG SO MUCH... AND THIS IS ALL I'VE DONE...?
NO, IT'S TOO SMALL ...
HUFF
HUFF
IS THIS...
... ABOUT THE RIGHT SIZE?
HUFF
I ITCH.
HUFF
WHAT'S WITH ALL THE MOSQUITOES ...?
MY SHIRT IS SOAKED WITH SWEAT...
HUFF
IT FEELS DISGUST-ING...!
IT FEELS DISGUST-ING.
HUFF
HUFF
DAMMIT...
GUH (WIPE)
I'M HOT.
HUFF

HUFF

TO DO THIS?

DAMMIT... SO WHAT?

ARE YOU SAYING I SHOULD STOP AND GO HOME? WELL...?

ZAKU

WHY AM I... DEALING WITH ALL OF THIS?

ZAKU

HUFF

IT FEELS DISGUST-ING.

ZAKU

I ITCH.

I'M HOT.

HUFF

HUFF

WHO'S ORDERING YOU TO DO ALL THIS...?

...ONLY EVER DOING THINGS UNDER SOME-ONE ELSE'S ORDERS.

...MAY HAVE LIVED MY LIFE...

..UNTIL NOW, I...

IF I THINK ABOUT IT...

IT WAS JUST...

YES.

...OR THAT MY WHOLE LIFE WAS SPENT IN CARELESSNESS...

IT'S NOT LIKE I EVER THOUGHT IT WAS SUFFOCATING...

...I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT MUCH.

WHAT WAS INTERESTING AND WHAT WAS BORING ...

I WAS THE DEFINITION OF AVERAGE IN JUMP ROPE COMPETITIONS AND MARATHONS.

IN THOSE GRAY DAYS.

4

5

I'VE NEVER EXCELLED AT ANYTHING PHYSICAL.

...A PATH.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GOING TO CRAM SCHOOL? IF YOU START UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDIES...THEY'LL BE MORE FUN.

SAY, KEIICHI.

IT WAS ONE LITTLE THING MOM SAID... THAT TURNED EVERYTHING AROUND.

A FEW DAYS AFTER THAT...

IT WAS LIKE A RIDDLE BOOK FROM A MANGA MAGAZINE.

IT WASN'T LIKE THE SCHOOL TESTS, WITH DOZENS OF THE SAME KIND OF QUESTION LINED UP.

THE TEST TO GET INTO CRAM SCHOOL WAS KIND OF LIKE A GAME. IT WAS REALLY INTERESTING.

NO, MA'AM, KEIICHI-KUN IS EXTREMELY INTELLIGENT.

WE COMPARED HIS GRADES WITH THE KRAEPELIN ANALYSIS*, AND WE FOUND SOMETHING VERY INTERESTING.

KEIICHI...? ARE YOU... SURE IT'S NOT SOME MISTAKE ...?

HIS GRADES AT SCHOOL ARE VERY AVERAGE...

*AN ANALYSIS OF MENTAL ABILITY BASED ON THE PSYCHIATRIC RESEARCH OF THE GERMAN PSYCHIATRIST EMIL KRAEPELIN.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU TOLD HIM TO DRAW THE NET OF A CUBE... KEIICHI-KUN MIGHT BE CONFUSED, BUT IF YOU ASK HIM WHAT WOULD HAPPENED TO A DIE IF YOU OPENED IT UP, HE WOULD ANSWER BEAUTIFULLY.

MAEBARA-KUN DOES VERY POORLY WITH QUESTIONS THAT DON'T HAVE ANY MEANING... HE CAN'T HOLD ANY INTEREST FOR DULL, BORING CONTENT THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS OWN LIFE.

IN THE END, I STARTED CRAM SCHOOL.

THERE WERE ONLY FOUR PEOPLE IN MY CLASS.

THIS IS NOT AVERAGE.

KEIICHI-KUN ANSWERED IT EASILY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY.

...THIS IS A PROBLEM THAT SAYS TO DRAW THE NET OF AN ICOSAHEDRON. WHEN WE REWORDED THIS PROBLEM LIKE I DID THE LAST ONE...

AND WHEN I DISCOVERED HOW MANY OF MY CLASSMATES RANKED LOWER THAN I DID...

IT WAS THE HIGHEST RANKING CLASS, CALLED THE SENBATSU.

"SENBATSU IS A JAPANESE WORD MEANING "TO CHOOSE" OR "TO SELECT," SPECIFICALLY IN THE SENSE OF PICKING OUT THE BEST.

I'M BETTER THAN EVERYBODY!

THE MORE I DID, THE MORE PRAISE I GOT.

MY TEACHERS SUDDENLY STARTED MAKING A FUSS OVER ME.

AND I STARTED SPENDING MY DAYS AS I NEVER HAD BEFORE.

THIS IS FUN!

...I FELT PLEASED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

AND IT WAS FUN TO SEE MY PARENTS SO SATISFIED.

PAPER: REPORT CARD

BUT THAT WAS ONLY AT FIRST.

...THEY CAME AGAIN...

...THE MORE THE IRRITATION PILED UP.

AND...

THE MORE THOSE DAYS WENT ON...

STUPID.

I GOT FED UP WITH CLASSES THAT WERE BEHIND WHERE I WAS.

BORING.

I STOPPED GETTING ALONG WITH MY FRIENDS

THE GRAY DAYS...

...TO START LIFE OVER FROM THE BEGINNING.

GARA (RATTLE)

GARA

THAT WAS AN EXPRESSION OF MY DESIRE...

MAY I GO IN THE CLASSROOM FIRST?

YES, OF COURSE.

A LOT HAPPENED... MY PARENTS SUGGESTED WE CHANGE OUR ENVIRONMENT.

AND WE CAME TO HINAMIZAWA...

...SENSEI.

AFTER THAT...

DOWA (STAND)

OOHHH!! THAT WAS A BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN HIT!!

BOFUA (POFF)

...AND ...

...I MET...

...THEM...

UGYAA!

AFTER THAT, MY DAYS WERE JUST ...

WH-WHAT'S WITH THESE GUYS ...!!?

A-ARE YOU OKAY...? ARE YOU?

OWIE, OWIE, FLY AWAY, SIR!

...FULL OF SUR-PRIS-ES...

OOOH-HO-HO-HO! JUST WHAT I'D EXPECT FROM A WUSSY CITY BOY. STRONG IN SPIRIT, BUT NOTHING ELSE. ☆

WE'LL ALL START YOUR SPECIAL TRAINING IMMEDIATELY, TODAY!

DID I AL-WAYS WAIT SO IMPA-TIENT-LY FOR MON-DAY TO COME?

WAS AFTER SCHOOL ALWAYS THIS FUN?

DID LUNCH ALWAYS TASTE THIS GOOD?

... ALWAYS SO TOUCH-ING?

WERE SMILES ...

IT'S ALL... FOR THOSE DAYS...

IT'S THE PATH I CHOSE.

NO, NO ONE'S ORDERING ME TO DO THIS.

...TO GET THOSE DAYS BACK.

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

KAKI SHOVE...

IT WILL ALL BE OVER. YES.

ZAAAA (WHOOOSH)

SOON... IT WILL BE OVER.

HUFF

HUFF

I HAVE TO CALL THAT MAN...

...AND LURE HIM OUT HERE...

HUFF

HUFF

...THIS LATE... ALREADY? ALL RIGHT... TIME TO GET THE BAT...

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

WHEN THE HIGURASHI CRY.

IT'S FINALLY TIME...

I KEPT YOU WAITING, SATOSHI.

CHAPTER 10

I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT WHERE TO CALL HIM FROM...

DAMMIT...

...WAIT...

NEXT I HAVE TO CALL THAT MAN AND LURE HIM OUT OF THE HOUSE...

!

WHAT ABOUT THE SCHOOL... DAMN...IT'S LOCKED...

GATA (RATTLE)

GATA

DAMMIT... TO THINK I HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT... I'M SO SOFT...!

IT'D BE TOO FAR TO CALL HIM FROM MY HOUSE...

...THE MAN FROM THE FOREST SERVICE FIELD OFFICE...THAT MANAGES THE SCHOOL...?

THAT'S...

SA (SNEAK)

THE PERFECT CHANCE...

...I CAN ONLY THINK... THAT THIS IS HELP FROM SATOSHI...

GARA (RATTLE)

GACHA (RATTLE)

GACHA

DOKUN (BADUM)

DOKUN

ALL RIGHT...

DOKUN

...
ALL RIGHT... THE FOREST SERVICE GUY IS GONE...

SIGN: FACULTY ROOM

職員室

DOKUN

TORURURURU

HURRY ...

DOKUN

TORURURURU

PICK UP...

TORURURURU (BRRRRRRING)

DOKUN

...WE CURRENTLY HAVE A YOUNG LADY FROM YOUR RESIDENCE, SATOKO HOJO, IN CUSTODY.

Ah... yes, this is Hojo...

...THIS IS THE OKINOMIYA POLICE. IS THIS THE RESIDENCE OF HOJO-SAN?

SATOKO!? What did she do!?

HE FELL FOR IT...!!

GACHA (CLICK)

...Hello?

DOKUN

!!

...RIGHT NOW? Argh... Man...That Satoko... What did she do?

YES... RIGHT NOW.

Now...? I just came out of the bath. I don't want to go out.

I'LL EXPLAIN THE DETAILS WHEN YOU GET HERE. CAN YOU COME RIGHT AWAY?

I HAVE TO HURRY...!!

I'LL TELL YOU THE DETAILS WHEN YOU GET HERE. WELL THEN, I'LL BE WAITING.

GACHAN (CLICK)

COME ON...!!!

DORURURURU (VRRRRROOM)

...I HOPE... I DIDN'T PASS HIM...

DOKUN

DOKUN (B-DMP)

DOKUN

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

...IS THAT ...!!?

LOOK CAREFULLY...

YOU CAN'T... MISTAKE SOMEONE ELSE FOR HIM...

IS THAT... HER UNCLE ...!?

PORURURURURU

...SATOSH!!!

LET'S GO...!

ZA (RUN)

THAT FACE!!! ALL RIGHT.

THOSE CLOTHES ...

WHOOKH!

DON (SHOVE)

ZUZAZAZAZA (SKIIIIID)

ZAKU (STEP)

...OW...

DOKUN (B-DMP)

DOKUN

THAT HURT ...

DOKUN

HUFF

A LITTLE THING LIKE THAT...

IT "HURT" ...?

DOKUN

HUFF

REMOVE ALL USELESS INFORMATION FROM YOUR BRAIN.

GUHA!

KILLING THE MAN IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES IS YOUR TOP PRIORITY.

UGOH!

GAHAA!

ENFORCE, ENFORCE, ENFORCE!

ZA

ZA

I WON'T LET YOU GET AWAY.

ZA

ZA

ZA

THIS MAN HURT SATOKO..

GASH (WHACK)

GA (WHAM)

EEP...

ZA (RUSTLE)

HER BODY AND HER MIND... COUNTLESS, COUNTLESS WOUNDS THAT MAY NEVER HEAL, HER WHOLE LIFE.

EEEEEK!

ZA

YOU ARE A HERESY, A MISTAKE, A PROBLEM TO THE WORLD.

GORU RUMBLE

AND...

...I...!

PARA

PARA

YOU NEVER SHOULD HAVE SHOWN UP.

WHERE DID YOU SQUIRM IN FROM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

ZUSHA (SQUISH)

EEEEEEEK!

ZA

EEEP!

ZA

ZA

KA (FLASH)

GOSHU (SMASH)

HHHH!!

...WILL ERASE YOU!!!

BE OVER.

BE OVER!

BISHA (ARTIST)

BISHA

GOSHU

SPLAT YOUR GUTS ALL OVER!

ZOD OFF!

HUFF

HUFF

DID I... KILL HIM ...?

HUFF

BUCH (WHOOSH)

HE DIDN'T EVEN COVER HIS HEAD

IAAAAAAAAAAA (Shhhhhh)

...THIS PLACE...

HUFF

NOH, KEIICH

CALM YOUR MIND

THE TIME TO BE PASSIONATE IS OVER..

...DAMN... DID I GET REALLY FAR FROM THE HOLE... WHILE I WAS CHASING HIM AROUND ...!?

DAMMIT. I'M NOT SURE I CAN CARRY THE BODY TO THE HOLE...

...NO.

MORE IMPOR-TANTLY!

THE BIKE...!

IF SOMEONE FINDS THAT BIKE STILL LYING ON THE ROAD, THERE'LL BE TROUBLE...!!

ZAAAAA (SHHHH)

HUFF

I HAVE TO HURRY AND GET RID OF IT...!

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

鬼ケ淵沼
よりは沼で
遊ばない!

SIGN: ONIGAFUCHI SWAMP/ GOOD CHILDREN DON'T PLAY IN SWAMPS!

SATOSHI!...

HUFF

HUFF

DOBON (SPLOOSH)

...I HAD THE WRONG IDEA ABOUT YOU...

ALL THIS TIME, I THINK...

...I'LL NEVER FORGET IT...

THIS SHORT TIME...

...THAT WE SHARED...

...I WILL LIVE TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY FOR BOTH OF US.

THAT'S WHY...I SWEAR THAT STARTING TOMORROW...

...THE PEACE YOU FINALLY MANAGED TO GET BACK...

BUT YOU DID IT FOR HER... AND THEN...

I CAN TELL.

...WAS LOST IN JUST A FEW DAYS...

AS FAR AS THE WORLD IS CONCERNED, THAT MURDER WAS COMMITTED BY SOME CRAZY PERSON ...

...I HAVE TO HURRY TO WHERE I HID THE SHOVEL...

ZA (STEP)

NEXT...

...I DISPOSE OF THE BODY...

ZAAAAAA (SHHHH)

I'M NOT SURE I CAN FIND... WHERE I LEFT THE SHOVEL ...!

DAMMIT...!! I DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD GET THIS DARK...!

GUI (WIPE)

.....GH!

I'LL GO BACK HOME FOR NOW AND GET A LANTERN AND A SHOVEL FROM THE SHED...

...IT'S NO GOOD...!

BOOO (DAAAAZE)

パシャン (SPLASH)

PASSING THE NIGHT IN FEAR...

...MIGHT BE MAKING DINNER FOR HER UNCLE.

...ABOUT NOW, SATOKO...

NOT KNOWING WHEN HE'LL BE BACK...

IT'S STILL... SO EARLY...

BUT...THAT UNCLE WON'T COME BACK EVER AGAIN... SHE'LL NEVER HAVE TO FEAR HIS ANGRY VOICE OR BE FORCED TO BE SAD...

I...

I...OH YEAH...

I DID IT...

...DID A...

...GOOD THING... RIGHT...?

SO...

OH...

AH HA AH HA HA ...

...WHY...

HA HA...

...WON'T...

...THE TEARS STOP?

WHY DOES... MY HEART...

AAAA

AHH

...HURT SO MUCH...?

HUFF

GASA (RUSTLE)

GASA

HUFF

HUFF

BEFORE ANYONE FINDS ME...

I HAVE TO HURRY... AND DISPOSE OF IT...

PASHA (SPLASH)

HUFF

GOOD... I MADE IT BACK TO THE BODY WITHOUT ANYTHING HAPPENING...

HUFF

HUFF

GUCHO

HUFF

ZUBYU (SQUELCH)

HUFF

PASHA

HUFF

GUCHO (SQUISH)

HUFF

IT'S OVER...

IT'S OVER...

HUFF

HUFF

HE'S COMPLETELY BURIED...IT'S OVER...!!

HUFF

ALL RIGHT ...

HUFF

IT'S OVER, DAMMIT...!!!

HUFF

HUFF

ZAAAAAAAAA (SHHHHHH)

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

...A CAR...

BURORORORORORO (VRRRRROOOOOM)

I HAVE TO AVOID IT...

UWAHHH...

KIKIII (SCREEE)

DA—

GURA (STAGGER)

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

...MY, MY. I WONDERED WHO IT MIGHT BE.

GOOD EVENING.

THE MOON IS LOVELY TONIGHT, ISN'T IT, MAEBARA-KUN...?

T-TAKANO-SAN...

DOKUN (BADUM)

DO

SHE SHOULDN'T... KNOW ANY-THING...

DO

DO (BMP)

SHE JUST CAME FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION I DID...

DO

...I FORGOT IT... WHEN I WENT TREASURE HUNTING WITH RENA AT THE DAM CONSTRUCTION SITE...

...WHAT'S THAT...? A SHOVEL...?

WHATEVER ARE YOU DOING OUT AT THIS HOUR...? AND WITHOUT AN UMBRELLA... YOU'RE SOAKING WET AND COVERED IN MUD...

HEE-HEE... EVEN THOUGH THE DAM IS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION OF WHERE YOU CAME FROM...? HEE-HEE...

HMM...? AND YOU WENT TO GO GET IT IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS DOWNPOUR...?

...I KILLED HER...

DOKUN

AS LONG AS I DON'T DROP A HANDKERCHIEF WITH MY INITIALS OR SOMETHING...

...NO ONE WILL KNOW...

YOU STILL HAVE A WEAPON— THE SHOVEL!

DOKUN

DOKUN

GU (CLENCH)

WILL YOU... SILENCE TAKANO-SAN...?

DOKUN

WHAT-WILL YOU DO, KEIICHI MAEBARA?

BY THE WAY... HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO LIE THERE ON THE GROUND ...?

WOULD YOU PLEASE GET OUT OF THE WAY...?

.....

KUSU (SNICKER)

KUSU

...SUCH A FRIGHTENING EXPRESSION. WAS I BEING TOO MEAN ...?

OH YEAH... IF I MOVE, SHE'LL LEAVE...

DAMN... AT A TIME LIKE THIS... IS IT... SPRAINED ...!?

...OW...

ZUKIN (STING)

I'LL TAKE YOU HOME... DON'T LIKE IT, THOUGH. IT MAKES IT LOOK LIKE I RAN YOU OVER...

.....

...KH.

HHP

ZAAAAAA (SHHHH)

...NGH...

THANKS...

VN (WIDE)

VN

KATSU

KATSU (CLACK)

EH? OH, SORRY. I DIDN'T QUITE CATCH THAT...

WHAT DID YOU SAY...?

VN

KATSU

—

...IGHT?

BOOOO (DAAAAZE

...THERE'S... ANOTHER... BICYCLE...? A FOLDING BIKE...?

WHA...?

DOKUN BADUM

THE BODY.

DID YOU BURY IT ALL RIGHT ...?

NII (SMIRK)

HOW DID SHE...?

DOKUN

WHAT DO I DO!?

DOKUN

WHAT DO I DO?

WAS THIS WOMAN...

WHY?

HOW?

...WATCHING ME?

DOKUN

DO I KILL HER!!?

...YOU WON'T PLAY THE FUNNY MAN OR THE STRAIGHT MAN...?

IT LOOKS LIKE...WE'RE NOT REALLY ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH ...

WHA ...?

...HUH...?

...AND ALL I HAD LEFT WAS TO GO HOME AND GO TO SLEEP...

AT THE END OF THE END...

WHAT AWFUL LUCK...

IT ALL WORKED OUT, SOME-HOW...

WHAT KIND OF WOMAN... DID I END UP... RUNNING INTO...?

IT WAS...A JOKE...?

...DAMN...

WELL THEN, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...DON'T TELL ANYONE...THAT YOU AND I WENT ON A NIGHT DRIVE JUST THE TWO OF US, MAEBARA-KUN.

ESPECIALLY NOT JIROU-SAN...

...THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I'LL BE OKAY FROM HERE. MOST OF THE PAIN IS GONE...

THAT'S RIGHT. JIROU TOMITAKE. I'M GLAD YOU REMEMBERED.

THE FOLDING BIKE...? THAT WAS IN THE BACK-SEAT...

MAE-BARA-KUN... WAS IT?

HEY THERE ...

HUH...? COME TO THINK OF IT...

JIROU-SAN...?

OH... TOMITAKE-SAN...

THAT BIKE IN THE BACK...

...IT'S TOMITAKE-SAN'S, ISN'T IT?

...WHY...

...DO YOU THINK THAT, I WONDER...

EH...?

HMM...

BUT... THAT WOULD BE STRANGE, WOULDN'T IT?

...I SAW IT WHEN I RAN INTO HIM ONCE. IT HAS A PRETTY UNIQUE FRAME.

...THEN HIS BICYCLE WOULD NEVER BE HERE... WITHOUT HIM, WOULD IT...?

IF JIROU-SAN ISN'T HERE...

I MEAN... JIROU-SAN STAYS IN TOWN AND ALWAYS COMES TO THIS VILLAGE ON HIS BIKE...

HUH...?

YOU AND I DIDN'T SEE EACH OTHER TONIGHT.

I SEE... THAT'S WHY THEY LOOK ALIKE...

...THAT'S MY BICYCLE...I HAD JIROU-SAN PICK IT OUT FOR ME... THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT WE HAVE SIMILAR TASTE...

...DIDN'T SEE EACH OTHER TONIGHT.

...YOU AND I...

...ARE WARNING ME.

ZO (CHILL)

MY INSTINCTS...

...THE SAME... AS ME...?

IS THIS WOMAN...

DOKUN

...OOZING FROM MYSELF.

I'M SURE IT'S NO DIFFERENT THAN THE AURA...

DOKUN

THE AURA I FEEL FROM HER, LIKE A ROTTING STENCH...

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER NOT TO RUN INTO THIS WOMAN.

DOKUN BADUM

...WHY DO YOU THINK THAT...?

I'M SURE IT'S BEST THAT WAY FOR YOU TOO...

OH, YES...

...IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...THEN IT'S FINE WITH ME...

BIKU (WINCE)

YOU'RE SO ANNOYING ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING...CAN'T YOU FIGURE *THAT* MUCH OUT ON YOUR OWN, BOY?

...IT'S A GOOD THING... THAT I'M SUCH A NICE PERSON.

.....

...IT'S TOO LATE.

IT'S TOO LATE TO KILL HER...

NOW...

BUT...

I SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HER GO HOME ALIVE.

DIE!

DIE.

ZRAAAAAA SHHHH

GET IN AN ACCIDENT...!

RELAX, KEIICHI MAEBARA.

A CRUEL END...

...BEFITTING HER.

USHA

GUSHA

THAT WOMAN...

...WILL DIE.

YORO (STAGGER)

GUSHA (SQUISH)

...AND MAKE HER DANCE UNTIL SHE'S BURNT BLACK.

GUSHA

I WILL WRAP HER IN FLAMES WHILE SHE'S STILL ALIVE...

GUSHA (SQUISH)

I SERIOUSLY DO...

I HOPE THAT'S TRUE...

GUSHA

EH...?

I'M... NOT... WALKING RIGHT NOW...

...BUT I HEAR FOOT-STEPS ...

...EXTRA FOOTSTEP.

I JUST... HEARD...

...ONE...

ZAAAAAAA (SHHHHH)

CHAPTER 11

...WAS IT...MY IMAGINATION...?

...IT'S ALREADY... AFTERNOON... WHAT SHOULD I...DO ABOUT SCHOOL...?

BOOOOHH (DAMAGE)

...YESTERDAY... I...

...MY HEAD... MY BODY...

FEEL SO... HEAVY...

.....

MAYBE I... REALLY SHOULD HAVE... KILLED HER BACK THERE...?

THEN... I MET...

...THAT WOMAN...

...FINALLY KILLED SATOKO'S UNCLE...

...AND BURIED HIM...

...I'LL GO TO SCHOOL.

NOW, THAT'S RIGHT...IT SHOULD BE "TIME TO BE PLEASED"...

IT WON'T DO ANY GOOD THINKING ABOUT IT NOW.

NO...EVEN IF THERE IS TROUBLE... I'LL DEAL WITH IT WHEN IT HAPPENS...

PETARI (STEP)

RIRIIIN

RIRIIIN (RRRRRING)

DARN IT... SCHOOL'S ALREADY OUT... EVERY-ONE'S...

I'LL GO TO SCHOOL AND SEE EVERYONE, EVEN IF IT'S ONLY FOR A LITTLE BIT.

TO REINSTATE THE DAILY LIFE THAT I GOT BACK...

.....

KEIICHI-KUUUN!

A FOOTSTEP... AGAIN...

BA (JUMP)

MAN, YOU DRANK A LOT OF LIQUOR AT THE FESTIVAL LAST NIGHT, KEI-CHAN! YOU WERE REALLY FIRED UP!

AH-HA-HA! YOU SHOULDN'T DO THAT, KEICHI-KUN!

HA-HA-HA, THE FESTIVAL? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT...?

...GUYS...!

OH, COME ON, KEI-CHAN! YOU'RE COMING TO SCHOOL *NOW*? IT'S ALREADY OVER!

AH-HA-HA! YOU'RE SUCH A BIG SLEEPYHEAD, KEIICHI-KUN! OHH!

WHAT...?

AND KEI-CHAN IGNORED ALL OF SHION'S STUPID PASSES AT HIM!! AH-HA-HA-HA-HA!

YUP!! HE WAS WATCHING! HE WAS CLAPPING SO HARD FOR YOU, RIKA-CHAN! DIDN'T YOU NOTICE?

...DID YOU WATCH MY DANCE PERFORMANCE, KEIICHI, SIR?

...TALKING...

...ABOUT...?

WHAT ON EARTH...

...ARE THEY...

...WHA...?

AH

NO ONE THOUGHT HE'D BE ABLE TO KNOCK DOWN THAT GIANT DOLL!

...DID WHAT NOW...?

HA

HA

HA

AND KEIICHI-KUN WAS AMAZING AT THE SHOOTING GALLERY!! OHH! I'LL TAKE VERY GOOD CARE OF THE STUFFED ANIMAL YOU WON FOR ME!

WHO...

REFUSING SHIN'S INVITATIONS

...WATCHING OVER RIKA-CHAN'S DANCE PERFOR-MANCE

I DON'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL REMEMBER

W- WAIT A SECOND WHAT ARE YOU ALL... TALKING ABOUT ?

I MEAN YESTERDAY, I...

WHO...

...DID ALL THAT ...?

THEN...

...AND THEN JUST DIS-APPEARED...?

AND YOU WERE REALLY POPULAR WITH THE NEIGHBOR-HOOD ASSOCIATION CHAIRMEN AT THE DRINKING PARTY AFTERWARD!!

CHAIRMAN KIMIYOSHI SAID HE'S IN LOVE WITH YOUR SALES PITCH! SAYS HE WANTS TO LET YOU TAKE CARE OF A FEW SHOPS AT THE NEXT FESTIVAL!!

...AND ENJOYED THE FESTIVAL WITH EVERY-ONE...

A KEIICHI MAEBARA THAT'S NOT ME APPEARED...

MAEBARA-SAN! LET ME HEAR ALL ABOUT THE SHOOTING GALLERY GAME SOMETIME!

THERE'S NO WAY.

BA (JUMP)

A KEIICHI MAE-BARA THAT'S NOT ME...?

RIDICU-LOUS!

WHO AM I...?

WE MET ON THE GROUNDS. YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU WERE HAVING FUN TALKING TO RIKA-CHAN IN HER PRIESTESS OUTFIT.

...RIKA-CHAN AND I...

H-

HEY... WH-WHEN... DID I...MEET UP WITH YOU GUYS YESTERDAY AGAIN...?

SEE... I...GOT SO DRUNK... I DON'T REMEMBER A THING...

.....

I MET WITH YOU WHEN YOU CAME OUT OF THE ASSEMBLY HALL WITH THE VILLAGE CHIEF AND THE OTHERS, KEIICHI, SIR. YOU WERE IN FRONT OF THE SAIGUDEN, SIR.

THE VILLAGE CHIEF WAS YELLING AT YOU, SAYING, "THAT'S A SACRED PLACE, DON'T GO NEAR IT!" DON'T YOU REMEMBER, SIR...?

EH...?

AH...!!

...WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, KEIICHI-SAN...? WHEN DID I SAY... THAT I HAD FUN PLAYING AT THE FESTIVAL...?

...WH-WHAT ABOUT YOU, SATOKO...? WE HAD FUN AT THE FESTIVAL TOGETHER, DIDN'T WE...?

WE TRIED TO STOP HER. WE SAID HER UNCLE GAVE HER PERMISSION...THAT HE WOULDN'T GET MAD IF SHE PLAYED WITH US...

...SHE SAID SHE'D FEEL BAD HAVING FUN BY HERSELF WHILE HER UNCLE WAITED AT HOME... AND RIGHT BEFORE WE WENT TO THE SHRINE...

WH-WHY NOT!!?

...WE INVITED... SATOKO-CHAN...BUT SHE DIDN'T... GO TO THE SHRINE...

SATOKO ...BUT...

BUT...YOUR UNCLE...I ALREADY—

I...HAVE AN UNCLE THAT I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF!! I'M NOT LIKE YOU, KEIICHI-SAN, WHO HAVE YOUR PARENTS TAKING CARE OF YOU...!!

BORO (CRY)

I WANTED... TO JOIN THE EXCITEMENT WITH EVERYONE TOO...BUT... IF I DID THAT, HE WOULD... AGAIN... AGAIN...

SATOKO, WHY ...!!?

...YOU'RE LUCKY, KEIICHI-SAN...GETTING TO HAVE FUN WITH EVERY-ONE AT THE FESTIVAL...I'M JEALOUS...

WHA—

WAAAAAAAHHH!

HE WAS REALLY MEAN TO ME YESTERDAY...!! HE YELLED!! AND SCREAMED...!! AND THIS MORNING!! HE TOLD ME TO WAKE HIM UP FOR BREAKFAST, SO I WOKE HIM UP...!! BUT HE GOT MAD AT ME!!

HE THREW THE FOOD I MADE...!! HE TURNED OVER THE POT OF MISO SOUP!!

...KEI-CHAN.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT... KEIICHI-SAN...!!?

HIKKU (HIC)

HIKKU

DIDN'T YOUR UNCLE NOT COME HOME LAST NIGHT!!?

...IS ALIVE ...!?

HER UNCLE ...

NO...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YOU SAY HER UNCLE... DIDN'T COME HOME LAST NIGHT...

DAMN...!!

GIKU (GULP)

WHY? WHY WOULDN'T HE COME HOME...?

...RENA HEARD IT TOO. YOU SAID... HER UNCLE DIDN'T COME HOME.

YOU'VE BEEN SAYING WEEEIRD THINGS, KEI-CHAN.

...!..SUDDENLY...?

WHAT ARE... THEY BOTH...

WHAT THE...?

IT'S WEIRD, ISN'T IT? I MEAN, HER UNCLE WAS THERE THIS MORNING. SO, I WONDER WHY...I WONDER?

IF IT CAN'T BE HELPED... WHAT WILL YOU DO...?

IT'S TRUE, HER UNCLE IS A TERRIBLE PERSON I THINK IT'S BETTER FOR HIM TO BE GONE TOO.

BUT HE IS AROUND, SO IT CAN'T BE HELPED, RIGHT?

CAN'T BE HELPED? WELL, THAT'S TRUE, BUT!! BUT THEN SATOKO ...

WH-WHAT ARE ***YOU*** SAYING...? OF COURSE IT'S BETTER FOR SATOKO'S UNCLE... NOT TO BE AROUND, ISN'T IT ...?

NU (LOOM)

...LET'S GO HOME, KEI-CHAN.

...LEAVE IT ALONE... IT WILL BE RESOLVED SOON...

W-WELL...

NN...

...TODAY RENA IS GOING TREASURE HUNTING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME... MII-CHAN'S COMING TOO...

WILL YOU COME WITH US TOO, KEI-CHAN? OF COURSE, YOU HAVE... NO RIGHT TO REFUSE...

...IS IT STILL GOING ON...?

SINCE YESTERDAY, THIS WHOLE TIME...

...THIS IS WEIRD...

...GH.

EVERYTHING... ABOUT TODAY...

...THAT MESSED-UP NIGHT...

AH... RENA, MY... H-HEAD... HURTS...

SO...I'M GOING TO THE CLINIC. I CAN'T GO WITH YOU...

BIKU CTWITCHD

Y-YEAH.

REALLY?

THEN...IT CAN'T BE HELPED...

MAKE SURE... ABSOLUTELY SURE TO GO TO THE CLINIC ...

I WANT YOU TO... SHOW ME YOUR RECEIPT TOMORROW, OKAY...?

(ZAWA RUSTLE)

WHERE... AM I?

THERE'S ANOTHER "KEIICHI MAEBARA"...

(CREEPY FOOTSTEPS KEEP FOLLOWING ME...

AND MORE THAN ANY-THING...

RENA AND MION ARE ACTING WEIRD...

HE'S ALIVE.

IS THIS THE HINAMIZAWA...

...THAT I KNOW ...!?

SIGN: IRIE CLINIC

.....

AGAIN... IT'S LIKE I WENT TO THE FESTIVAL...

DID YOU... GO TOO, KANTOKU...? TO THE FESTIVAL ...

YES, OF COURSE. I MAY NOT LOOK IT, BUT I'M AN OFFICER ON THE COTTON DRIFTING COMMITTEE.

診察室

HMMM.

SIGN: EXAMINATION ROOM

IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE A COLD.

I'M MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SCRATCHES AND CUTS ALL OVER YOUR BODY. THEY LOOK VERY PAINFUL. YOU GOT TOO EXCITED AT THE FESTIVAL LAST NIGHT, DIDN'T YOU?

DID YOU... SEE ME THERE?

.....?

...ACTUALLY, I WAS DRINKING WITH THE CHAIRMEN IN THE HEADQUARTERS TENT THE WHOLE TIME... SO I DIDN'T LOOK AROUND AT ALL.

I DON'T THINK I DID SEE YOU, MAEBARA-SAN.

THAT WAS A STRANGE QUESTION. DID YOU DRINK TOO MUCH ALCOHOL AND LOSE YOUR MEMORIES OF YESTERDAY?

.....

YOU SHOULDN'T DO THAT. YOU'RE UNDERAGE! ♪

I'M SURE ...

GUH (CLENCH)

...THIS IS GOING TO SOUND WEIRD, BUT...

MAEBARA-SAN...? IS THERE...

...SOME-THING BOTHERING YOU...?

.....?

...IS IT POSSIBLE... THAT THERE'S SOMEONE WHO LOOKS JUST LIKE ME...AND HE'S GOING ALL AROUND HINAMIZAWA IN MY PLACE...?

THERE WILL BE ANOTHER FESTIVAL NEXT YEAR. YOU CAN GO THEN...

REALLY?

THAT'S NOT IT!!!

I DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL...BUT ACCORDING TO WHAT EVERYONE SAYS, I WAS THERE...!!

.....

ACTUALLY, I... DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL... YESTERDAY.

NO... THAT'S NOT IT. I REALLY DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL...

...LET ME SORT THIS OUT.

BASICALLY, YOU WENT TO THE FESTIVAL, BUT YOU DON'T REMEMBER IT... IS THAT IT?

...NEVER. AND... I DIDN'T LOSE MY MEMORIES... OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT...I MEAN...

...DURING THE TIME OF THE FESTIVAL...I KNOW I WAS TAKING CARE OF SOME OTHER BUSINESS...

...PLEASE DON'T BE OFFENDED, MAEBARA-SAN...

...BUT, BEFORE NOW, HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU SUDDENLY REALIZED YOU WERE IN ANOTHER PLACE?

CAN YOU... PROVE THAT WITH CLEAR EVIDENCE...?

...ER...

THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. I HAVE PERFECT, CLEAR MEMORIES OF IT...NO... IT'S A FACT.

AND YOU'RE ***SURE*** YOU TOOK CARE OF IT...? I HATE TO BE RUDE, BUT...IT'S NOT JUST AN ASSUMPTION?

KARI (SCRITCH)

KARI

IT WOULD SEEM YOUR NERVES ARE A LITTLE EXCITED. I COULD GIVE YOU A SHOT OF A SEDATIVE TO HELP YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES?

...I DIDN'T REALLY COME HERE TO LIE DOWN. I WON'T, THANK YOU.

...WHY DON'T YOU...LIE DOWN FOR A BIT, MAEBARA-SAN...? CALM DOWN AND YOU'LL FEEL BETTER.

KACHI (CLICK)

I'M NOT A CRAZY PERSON !!!!

GATAN (CLATTER)

I DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL!!! THERE'S REALLY NO DOUBT ABOUT IT!!

IF I OFFENDED YOU, I APOLOGIZE.

SO PLEASE, CALM DOWN. TAKE A DEEP BREATH—

.....

SO YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME... UNLESS I TELL YOU EVERY-THING I WAS DOING DURING THAT TIME?

I BELIEVE YOU. I BELIEVE YOU...

YOU DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL... CORRECT?

...I UNDER-STAND.

...I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ON THE FESTIVAL GROUNDS.

...BECAUSE AT THAT TIME, I...

NO, I BELIEVE YOU. I BELIEVE YOU, MAEBARA-SAN. SO PLEASE, SIT DOWN...

...WAS... KILLING SATOKO'S UNCLE.

...YOU... SATOKO-CHAN'S... UNCLE...?

...YES.

...WHY WOULD YOU DO SUCH A... NO...THAT'S A STUPID QUESTION ...

...I SEE... HEH HEH...

AND YOU GOT THOSE INJURIES... THEN...?

...YES. I CHASED HIM...ON THE FOREST PATH BY SATOKO'S HOUSE.

I CALLED HIM OUT TO THE FOREST PATH WITH A FAKE PHONE CALL FROM THE SCHOOL...THE FOREST SERVICE MAN HAPPENED TO BE GOING IN AND OUT OF THE SCHOOL...THAT'S HOW I GOT IN.

MY WEAPON... WAS SATOSHI'S BAT...I THREW THE BIKE HER UNCLE RODE... IN ONIGAFUCHI SWAMP...AND BURIED THE BODY...IN THE FOREST.

.....

...I'LL BELIEVE YOU, MAEBARA-SAN... WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY... DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A DREAM.

I'M SURE EVERYONE IN CLASS SAW SOMEONE WHO LOOKED LIKE YOU...AND MASS PSYCHOLOGY WENT TO WORK AND GAVE THEM ALL THE ILLUSION THAT YOU WERE AT THE FESTIVAL.

KANTOKU ...

.....

...DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU'VE COMMITTED A CRIME ...?

SU (SE)

...I'M A DOCTOR. IT'S MY JOB TO SAVE PEOPLE'S LIVES. SO I CAN'T SAY I APPROVE OF TAKING ANYONE'S LIFE.

...SO I'LL SAY THIS TO YOU...

NO. I DID IT TO TAKE BACK THE PEACEFUL TIMES FROM BEFORE HE WAS HERE.

...SO I WAS PLANNING TO FORGET RIGHT AWAY THAT I'D KILLED HIM AND GO BACK TO LIVING LIFE AS NORMAL.

...KH.

...FOR SAVING SATOKO-CHAN.

THANK YOU...

...KANTOKU...

... NGH ...

I WAS SURE THAT I KILLED HIM...BUT APPARENTLY... HE WENT BACK HOME...

...IT'S WEIRD...

GUI (WIPE)

WHAT'S WEIRD?

ZAWA (RUSTLE)

... BUT ...

DEPENDING ON THE SITUATION... SOMETIMES WHEN SOMEONE FAINTS OR HAS BEEN ASPHYXIATED, THEY LOOK DEAD TO AN UNTRAINED EYE... COULD THAT BE THE CASE?

!!

...IT'S NOT LIKE I TOOK HIS PULSE... BUT I THINK I DEFINITELY DEALT A KILLING BLOW...

....THAT... FEELING...

WILL YOU RECREATE THE SITUATION FOR ME, MAEBARA-SAN...?

GORO (RUMBLE)

GORO

...HMM... IN THAT CASE... HE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DEAD.

AND...EVEN IF HE WAS STILL BREATHING...IF HE WAS BURIED IN RAINWATER AND MUD...IT WOULD DEFINITELY CAUSE BRAIN DEATH...

...BUT! SATOKO SAYS HE'S ALIVE...!!!!

...I'M AFRAID TO MAKE THIS CONJECTURE, BUT...

EH !!?

...IS THERE A POSSIBIL-ITY THAT THE MAN YOU KILLED..

...WASN'T HER UNCLE, BUT SOME-ONE ELSE?

YES, THAT'S RIGHT. THAT'S HIM.

...TH-THERE'S NO WAY...!! I MEAN...HE'S THE GUY I SAW AT SATOKO'S HOUSE THE OTHER DAY, RIGHT!!?

...NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...I'VE NEVER SEEN IT ...

...BUT A LONG TIME AGO, SATOKO-CHAN...

C-COULD YOU DE-SCRIBE... HIS FEA-TURES ONE MORE TIME..!!?

YEAH... YOU KNOW... SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE IT SO ANYONE COULD IDENTIFY HIM AT FIRST GLANCE!?

...IN THE END ...

FUUUU (SIIIIGH)

GI (CREAK)

...I MADE AN OUTRAGEOUS... CONFESSION OF MURDER...

A TATTOO...

...SAID THERE WAS A TATTOO OF A TIGER OR SOMETHING... ON HIS BACK OR SOMEWHERE...

...LET'S THINK ABOUT THIS A LITTLE MORE SERIOUSLY.

IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL GO MAKE SOME TEA. IT'S TIME FOR THE CLINIC TO BE CLOSING, AFTER ALL.

KACHI (CLICK)

I GUESS I'LL... USE THE BATHROOM.

...BUT... KANTOKU... LISTENED TO ME WITHOUT RUNNING AWAY... RIGHT?

YES...ON THAT DAY, WE PROMISED... I THOUGHT...

TO NEVER EVER MAKE HER CRY.

...IF ANYONE WOULD BELIEVE ME, IT WOULD BE KANTOKU...

...

...

...NN?

IF THAT HAPPENS, WE'LL HOLD HIM DOWN. HOW MANY OF THE MALE STAFF ARE STILL HERE?

PLEASE MIX IT WITH ISOMITAL OR RAVONAL AND HIDE THE FLAVOR WITH SUGAR AND MILK.

...KAN-TOKU?

INCLUDING YAMAINU AND US, THREE.

SOMETIMES THE SUDDEN SLEEPINESS DETONATES A SENSE OF MISTRUST, AND THEY LASH OUT, YOU KNOW...?

BLACK TEA, RIGHT? I'LL GET IT READY.

GETTING READY IN CASE I GET VIOLENT ...?

KAN-TOKU?

HE'S TELLING THEM... TO MIX DRUGS IN THE TEA...?

NO...

THAT'S RIDICULOUS...

BUT I TRUSTED HIM.

WHAT ARE THEY... TALKING ABOUT!!?

...BUT FOR A MENTAL DISORDER TO MANIFEST SO SUDDENLY... IT'S UNTHINKABLE. OR MAYBE IT'S INBORN, OR THE SYMPTOMS WERE THERE BEFORE HE MOVED HERE... ANYWAY, I'M GOING TO HAVE MAEBARA-SAN SLEEP PEACEFULLY.

THE SYMPTOMS RESEMBLE MENTAL CONDITIONS SUCH AS MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDERS.

THERE ARE SIGNS HE'S EITHER LYING OR HE THINKS HE DID SOMETHING HE DIDN'T. HIS MEMORIES OF YESTERDAY ARE ESPECIALLY CONFUSED, AND HE'S LOST THE ABILITY TO DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION.

BATA

BATA (STAMP)

IRIE-SENSEI, IT'S TERRIBLE...!! IT'S TAKANO-SAN...THEY FOUND HER!!

I TRUSTED HIM.

IT WAS ALL A LIE...!!?

I TRUSTED HIM...

ZU (SLIDE)

HOW...CRUEL...!!

TAKANO-SAN!? WHERE ...?

U-UM, WELL...! APPARENTLY THEY FOUND HER BURNED REMAINS DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS IN GIFU...

SHE'S DEAD!?

AND... BURNED TO DEATH? WHAT DO YOU MEAN!? IN AN ACCIDENT?

ACCORDING TO THE GIFU POLICE REPORT... THERE'S A VERY STRONG POSSIBILITY IT WAS MURDER ...

!!?

DEAD...!? TAKANO-SAN!!?

SERVES HER RIGHT !!!

SHE'S DEAD!! I WISHED SHE WOULD DIE, AND MY CURSE WAS FULFILLED ...!!

SERVES HER RIGHT!!!

SERVES HER RIGHT!

HEH-HEH-HEH...!! THAT'S RIGHT. IT MIGHT NOT BE OYASHIRO-SAMA...

...BUT THERE'S NO MISTAKING IT. THIS IS A CURSE...

A CURSE !!

IF THIS ISN'T A BUNCH OF COINCIDENCES ...

...AND THEY DIED BECAUSE I WISHED THEM TO...

...

RISA-SAN DIED AND TAKANO-SAN DIED ...

WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON IN HINA-MIZAWA...?

DON'T TELL ME THIS IS OYASHIRO-SAMA'S CURSE ...!!

THEN YOU CAN DIE NEXT!! KANTOKU!!

DAMMIT...

DAMMIT...

I FEEL SO STUPID...!

I HATE THIS...

DIE...

I TRUSTED YOU.

I TRUSTED YOU...

DIE...

I'M GOING TO GO CHECK

...THE BODY...!!

I TRUSTED YOU...!!!

ZAKU (SHOVE)

HUFF

ZAKU

I'M SURE...

ZAKU

HUFF

...IT WAS AROUND HERE...

HUFF

ZAKU

THE POSITION.

THE FEELING OF THE GROUND HERE... THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT...

HUFF

HUFF

IT'S GOTTEN PRETTY DARK... I GUESS I'LL TURN ON THE LIGHT...

KACHI (CLICK)

カチ

NU (APPEAR)

...WHA!?

GOOD EVENING, MAEBARA-SAN.

OO... ISHI...

...YOU SHOULD ADD "SAN" TO THE NAMES OF YOUR ELDERS, YOU KNOW?

...IF YOU DON'T, YOU'LL RUN INTO ALL KINDS OF PROBLEMS AS AN ADULT... NN-HN-HN.

THE MOON IS LOVELY THIS EVENING, ISN'T IT...?

ZAAAAAA SHHHH

...DON'T... MIND YOU ...?

THINK OF US AS TREES IN THE FOREST.

...PLEASE, DON'T MIND US.

...
ERK
...

AND WORKING SO EARNESTLY. WE WON'T GET IN YOUR WAY. PLEASE DIG TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT... NN-HN-HN.

THAT'S RIGHT. YOU'RE OUT AT THIS TIME OF THIS NIGHT IN THIS DOWN-POUR.

BLIN (WHAM)

!!!

GASHI (CLAMP)

WHA...

...I'LL PASS.

COME NOW.

BASHAN

PLEASE CONTINUE.

BASHAN SPLASH

SHE REALLY IS A WOMAN WHO DESERVED TO DIE ...!!!

ZAKU

ZAKU (SHOVEL)

IS THIS REALLY TAKANO-SAN'S DOING ...?

DAMMIT ...!!

DAMN!

HOW DID IT TURN OUT LIKE THIS ...?

AT THIS RATE, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THERE'S A TATTOO ON HIM OR NOT...

THAT MAN'S CORPSE WILL COME TO THE SURFACE ...

IT'S ALL... OVER...

YORO (STAGGER)

...KH.

ZAKU

ZAKU

ZAKU (SHOVEL)

DAMMIT...!!!

HUFF

...DAMMIT.

HUFF

HOW LONG... DO I HAVE TO DI—?

GAKUN (COLLAPSE)

(SIGH) (THUNK)

...THAT'S WIERD. THE GROUND GOT... HARDER?

DID I... DIG A HOLE THIS DEEP TO BEGIN WITH...?

CHAPU (SPLISH)

SU (SS)

HEY.

...YOUNG PEOPLE THESE DAYS HAVE NO STAMINA...

ZAKU

ZAKU

ZAKU

GUN CYANKO

DGSHA SPLASH

IS IT A HOBBY OF YOURS TO DIG HOLES IN THE RAIN?

...KEIICHI MAEBARA-SAN.

SU

TOPUN (SPLISH)

BASHAN SPLASH

!!!

...LIKE HELL... THAT'D BE ANYONE'S HOBBY...

.....

.....

DAMMIT...
DAMMIT...

...WHAT KIND OF TREASURE IS BURIED IN THAT HOLE, I WONDER... PLEASE GIVE ME A LITTLE HINT.

BASHAN (SPLASH)

IT ALL STARTED WITH HIM.

...THE CAUSE OF IT ALL!!

THE WORLD WENT CRAZY.

...I ENDED UP MURDERING HIM...

...SATOKO WAS BULLIED BY HER UNCLE...

IT ALL WENT CRAZY AFTER YOU SHOWED UP...

I'LL KILL YOU WITH A CURSE!!!!

...THEN YOU DIE!!

YOU DIE TOO... DIE!!

IF I HAVE THE POWER TO KILL TAKANO-SAN WITH A CURSE...

OOISHI-SAN.

IT'S BECAUSE THESE TIMES ARE SO PEACEFUL... WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT WAS NORMAL...

THAT'S A REBELLIOUS LOOK IN YOUR EYES. SHALL WE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE YOU STUDY THAT AREA OVER THERE A LITTLE...?

HA-HA... SO NOW YOU FIND IT, YOU IDIOTS...

.....!

...YES, YES. WHAT IS IT?

PLEASE LOOK AT THIS.

...WHAT IS THIS?

...OOISHI-SAN, THE GROUND IS PRETTY HARD HERE. I DON'T THINK IT WOULD BE ANY DEEPER THAN THIS.

...PROBABLY JUST AN OLD WATER PIPE... IT LOOKS LIKE IT CONNECTS TO THE IRRIGATION CHANNEL OVER THERE.

...NO, IT CLEARLY FELT LIKE THIS GROUND HAD BEEN DUG UP BEFORE. BUT AFTER DIGGING THIS FAR, THE GROUND SUDDENLY GOT HARDER...

...I THINK WE'VE PROBABLY DUG DEEPER THAN THE ORIGINAL HOLE.

...WERE YOU DIGGING IN THE WRONG PLACE?

...SO WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? THERE WAS A HOLE HERE, BUT IT WAS JUST FILLED BACK UP WITH NOTHING...?

IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE ALL SAYING?

NA-HA-HA!! YOU GOT ME.

WHAT... DID HE SAY...?

WHAT... DOES THAT MEAN...?

THERE'S NO BODY HERE...?

THE PRIMARY PROOF OF WHAT I DID THAT NIGHT... IS GONE...?

ARE THEY SAYING I IMAGINED IT ALL...?

THAT'S RIDICULOUS!!!

I DIDN'T FINISH HIM OFF...

...AND HE CRAWLED OUT OF HERE AND WENT BACK HOME...?

BIKU (TWITCH)

EEK!!

ZA (STEP)

THAT'S RIDICULOUS ...!!!

.....

SU (SS)

—GH...

CHUN (CHIRP)

CHUN

OR IF THE POLICE COME.

I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW.

...I DON'T CARE IF IT'S AN OBVIOUS WEAPON.

OR IF ANYONE SEES ME.

GISHI (CREAK)

GI (CREAK)

GISHI

THE WORLD'S GONE INSANE ANYWAY ...

A WORLD WHERE "I" JUST SHOW UP AND PLAY WITH EVERYONE EVEN WHEN I'M NOT THERE.

EVEN IF THE POLICE ARREST ME...

...THE OTHER ME WILL PROBABLY COME ON HOME LIKE IT'S ONLY NATURAL...

PEVIN (STEP)

LET'S...

...LET'S GO, SATOSHI ...ONE MORE TIME.

PICHICHI (CH-CH-CHEEP)

A FOOTSTEP...

...ARE YOU... SATOSHI...?

BY... ANY CHANCE ...

...KILL HIM...

KARA (RATTLE)

KARA

IT'S...

...NOT LOCKED ...

THE TV...

...AND THE REMAINS... OF MISO SOUP...?

DRIED UP...

...RICE...

HAS IT BEEN THIS WAY...SINCE YESTERDAY...?

SHUN SHUN

SFX: SHUN (BLUB) SHUN SHUN

GISHI (CREAK)

...HER UNCLE ISN'T ANYWHERE IN HERE? BUT IT'S SO EARLY IN THE MORNING...

SHUN

SHUN

SHUN

KIA (RATTLE)

!!

KARA (RATTLE)

KARA

SHUN

SHUN

THIS SOUND... IS IT FROM... THE WASH-ROOM? THE SOUND OF BOILING WATER...?

...THIS IS THE SAME DRIED RICE AS BEFORE...?

WAIT...

SHUN

...SATOKO'S CLOTHES... IS SATOKO IN THE BATH ...?

SHUN

SHUN

SHUN

SHUN

SHE'S BEEN IN THE BATH SINCE YESTERDAY ...!!!?

SHUN

SHUN

SHUN

NO... IT CAN'T BE.

IT CAN'T BE.

SA-

GARA (RATTLE)

GARA

SA

SA-

SATOOOOOOK!

CHAPTER 12

SATOKO!

CHAPTER 12

SATO—

HOT...!

!!

BA RECOIL

ZABA (SPLASH)

SHE SPENT A WHOLE NIGHT...IN THIS HOT WATER...!?

SATOKO!

HANG IN THERE !!

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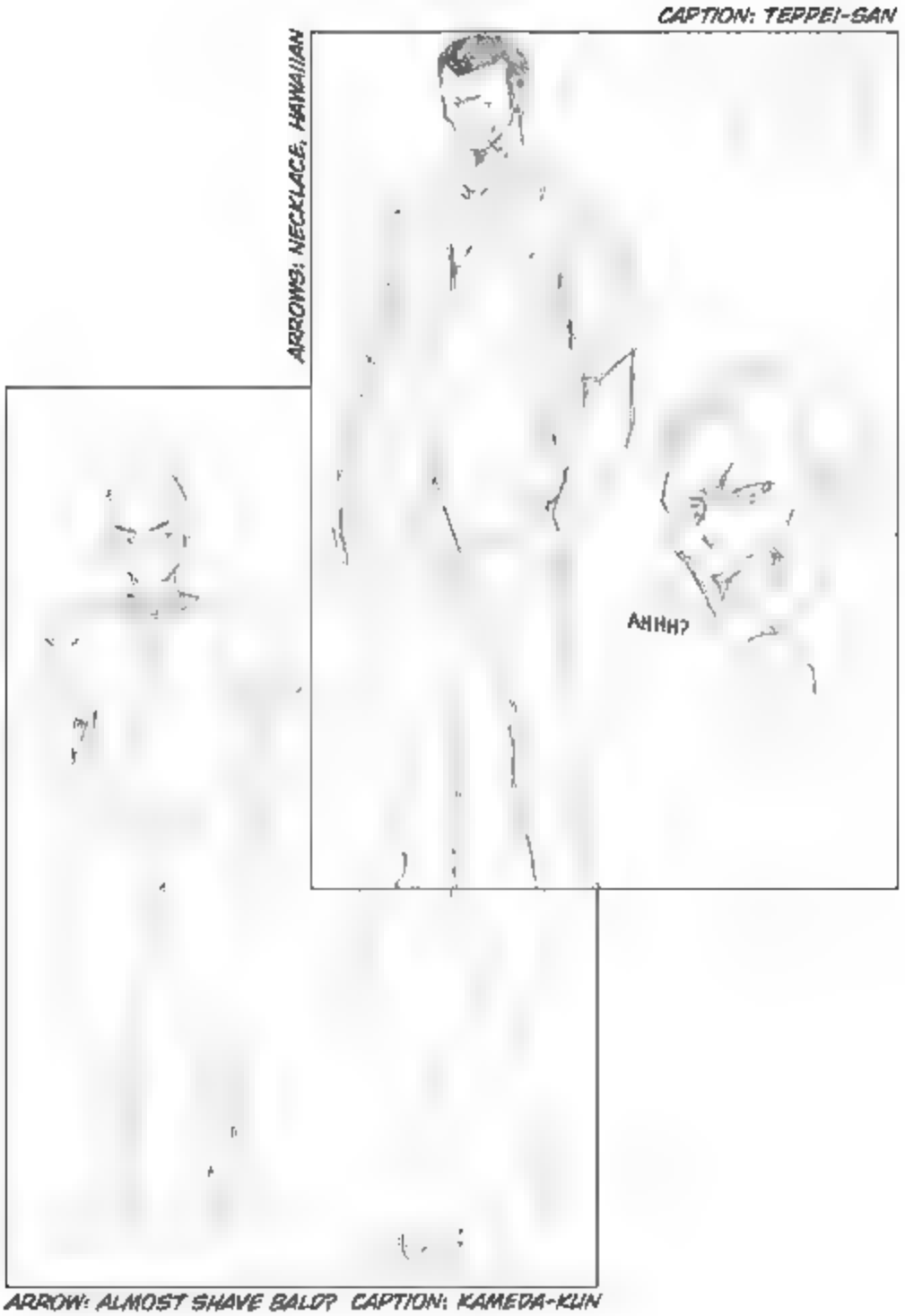


OH YEAH... IN A SITU-ATION LIKE THIS, I NEED TO COOL HER DOWN...!!

JAAAA (SHHH)

HITA (PLACE)

...NGH...

SATOKO!!! IT'S ME!! IT'S KEIICHI! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ...!!?

AH... KEI...ICHI... SA...HFF... HFF...

.....?

IS SHE... COUNTING...?

FIVE THOUSAND THIRTY-NINE...?

...TY-EIGHT.

.. FIVE THOUSAND THIRTY-NINE...FIVE THOUSAND.

...ARE YOU OKAY, SATOKO...!? IT'S OKAY NOW. I'LL... NII-NII WILL DO EVERYTHING HE CAN TO HELP YOU...!!

TEN THOU-SAND.

HOW HIGH DO YOU HAVE TO COUNT WHEN YOU TAKE A BATH AT YOUR HOUSE...!!?

SATOKO... ARE YOU COUNTING!? F-FIVE THOUSAND ...?

DON (WHAM)

THAT BASTARD ...!!!

I'LL KILL HIM...!!!

I'LL KILL HIM...!!! NO MATTER WHAT!!!

!!

KEI...I... CHI... SAN...?

DAMMIT... TAKING CARE OF SATOKO TAKES PRIORITY NOW...!!

JUST YOU WAIT... SA-TOKO.

NO MATTER WHAT... NII-NII...

...IS GOING TO HELP YOU...!!

THAT'S...

...WE'RE ALMOST THERE, SATOKO.

WHAT IS IT?

I DON'T KNOW. I'LL GO CHECK IT OUT.

...LEAVING A LADY IN A PLACE LIKE THIS IN ONLY A BATH TOWEL ...

...THAT WON'T DO...

IF YOU CAN TALK BACK TO ME LIKE THAT, YOU'LL BE FINE.

GASA (RUSTLE)

.....

.....

HE HAD A HIGH FEVER AND INCONTINENCE, AND I COULD SEE THAT HE WAS EXTREMELY DELIRIOUS. I THOUGHT THEY WERE TYPICAL SIGNS OF A SEVERE OVERDOSE, SO I STARTED TREATING HIM IMMEDIATELY.

SO THERE WAS A PITCHER OF WATER AND AN EMPTY BOTTLE OF SLEEPING PILLS ON THE DESK, AND YOU IMMEDIATELY THOUGHT IT WAS SUICIDE, THEN?

HE WAS ON THE SOFA IN HIS OFFICE. HE LOOKED LIKE HE WAS SLEEPING.

SO YOU WERE ON SHIFT THAT MORNING AND WERE THE FIRST TO FIND HIM?

WHO...

...COULD IT HAVE BEEN...?

SUICIDE...?

HELLO! THIS IS KOMIYAMA. HELLO! IT APPEARS TO BE A SUICIDE OVERDOSE. HE LEFT NO NOTE.

ZAAAA (KKKHHHD)

This is headquarters. This is headquarters. Komiyama-san, do you read? Over.

THEN...

...COULD IT BE...

...WISHED YESTERDAY THAT KANTOKU WOULD DIE...

THEN I...

NOT AS FAR AS I KNOW...

...TAKANO-SAN DIED THE NEXT DAY...

WHEN I WISHED THAT SHE WOULD DIE...

DID HE NORMALLY USE SLEEPING PILLS?

IRIE-SENSEI'S PERSONALITY WAS ALWAYS LIKE THAT, SO HE NEVER SEEMED LIKE...

I KNEW IT...!!

...THEY DIE...

IF I WISH FOR SOMEONE TO DIE...

THIS IS A MESSED-UP WORLD...

I'LL KILL YOU WITH A CURSE!!!!

THEN YOU DIE!!

...WHAT ABOUT OOISHI...?

THE MOON IS LOVELY THIS EVENING, ISN'T IT.

SO THEN...

Backup is on the way. The chief wants you to leave things to them and go back to searching for Ooishi's car.

ROGER! WELL, EXCUSE ME. BACKUP IS ON THE WAY HERE, SO PLEASE LEAVE THE SCENE AS IT IS.

...I'M OFF.

(GASA (RUSTLE)

THEY DIDN'T JUST... SAY SOMETHING ABOUT SEARCHING FOR OOISHI'S CAR, DID THEY...!!?

OOISHI...IS MISSING...?

...TAKANO-SAN... KANTOKU... OOISHI... IF I WISH IT...

...THEN THE NEXT DAY...THEY DISAPPEAR...!!!

...GH!! OH, SATOKO... DON'T STARTLE ME LIKE THAT...

...I'M THE ONE WHO'S STARTLED... PLEASE DON'T YELL LIKE THAT...

KYAAA...!

BA (JUMP)

UWAAAAHHH!

ANYWAY, WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON...?

...FROM WHAT I JUST HEARD OF THE POLICE TALKING...

...MY HEAD STILL HURTS, BUT...

...I CAN'T STAY OUTSIDE DRESSED LIKE THIS FOREVER...

HOW... ARE YOU FEELING ...?

EH...?

...APPAR-ENTLY KANTOKU... KILLED HIMSELF...

...I'M SURE THAT'S WHAT I HEARD... THEY SAID IRIE-SENSEI KILLED HIMSELF...

K-KEIICHI-SAN...!! IS THAT TRUE...!!? YOU DIDN'T HEAR IT WRONG, DID YOU...!?

NO... HE'D NEVER ...!!!

NO... IT'S NOT TRUE...!! MY KANTOKU WOULDN'T KILL HIM-SELF...!!

UWAAAAAAHH!

...I... YESTERDAY... THAT IS... I GOT INTO A FIGHT...WITH KANTOKU...

I CURSED HIM...SAYING HE SHOULD DIE...THEN... HE REALLY... DID...

HIKKU

HIKKU

...WHY... ARE YOU APOLOGIZING ...?

.....

...I'M SORRY...

...LET'S GO TO RIKA'S HOUSE...I WANT...TO GET SOME CLOTHES ON...

IT WON'T BE TOO LATE... TO GET A MEDICAL EXAM AFTER THAT...

.....

...IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT KEIICHI-SAN... KANTOKU...IS AN ADULT, AFTER ALL...

...IF CIRCUMSTANCES WERE BAD ENOUGH TO ABANDON HIS LIFE...IT'S SOMETHING HE WOULD DO AFTER A LOT OF WORRYING ABOUT IT... IT'S NOT ANYONE'S FAULT...

MIN
MIN
MIN
MIIIIIN
CHIIIII

YES... EVERY-THING'S BEEN CRAZY... SINCE THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING ...

AT SOME POINT...I STARTED HEARING FOOTSTEPS WALKING BEHIND ME...

FOOT-STEPS...?

.....

...ON THE DAY OF THE COTTON DRIFTING...I DIDN'T GO TO THE FESTIVAL... I WAS DOING SOMETHING ELSE...THE WHOLE TIME...

AND IT'S DEFINITELY NOT THAT I LOST MY MEMORIES...

AND...AFTER THAT...THAT NIGHT... I MET TAKANO-SAN... THEN I FELT LIKE SHE WAS LOOKING DOWN ON ME...SO, IN MY HEART, I PRAYED THAT SHE WOULD DIE...

TAKANO-SAN DOES HAVE THAT KIND OF AURA AROUND HER...

I CAN'T SAY I DON'T UNDER-STAND...

MIN (HUM)

MIN

DID YOU KNOW... THAT TAKANO-SAN DIED...? APPARENTLY YESTERDAY SHE BURNED TO DEATH SOMEWHERE

EH ...?

...!!!

ACTUALLY... YESTERDAY... YESTERDAY, I... PRAYED...THAT HE WOULD DIE TOO...

APPARENTLY... HE'S MISSING RIGHT NOW...

...AND... DO YOU KNOW THE DETECTIVE? OOISHI ...?

YOUR UNCLE...

IT'S NOT ONLY THAT!! THERE'S SOMETHING EVEN CRAZIER... I MEAN...

HO-HO-HO-HO...THAT'S PRETTY SCARY... I NEED TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO MAKE YOU HATE ME, KEIICHI-SAN...

...HO HO...

HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN!! THERE'S NO WAY THAT HE COULD HAVE BEEN THERE...!!

WILL YOU PLEASE STOP TALKING ABOUT HIM!? I DON'T LIKE IT!!

HE WAS... THERE YESTERDAY, RIGHT...? AT YOUR HOUSE...

...PLEASE DON'T... TALK ABOUT MY UNCLE...

I SAID STOP IT!! NO... NOOO !!!

HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN THERE SINCE THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING... BECAUSE... BECAUSE...

...I KILLED HIM...!!! WITH MY OWN HANDS...!!

...ON THE NIGHT OF THE FESTIVAL I KILLED YOUR UNCLE...

SO...HE COULDN'T HAVE... COME BACK HOME...

.....

BUT!! THE BODY WAS GONE!!! BUT I WAS SURE I HAD KILLED HIM...!! AND HE WENT HOME AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED!! THERE'S NO WAY.. THAT SOMETHING LIKE THAT COULD HAPPEN, RIGHT!!?

THAT'S WHY I... WENT TO MAKE SURE THERE WAS PROOF THAT I KILLED HIM...TO DIG UP THE BODY...!!

BUT... YOUR UNCLE DID COME BACK ...!!

...YOU... THINK...I'VE GONE INSANE TOO...DON'T YOU...?

.....

I'LL GO HOME AFTER I MAKE SURE YOU GET TO THE CLINIC, SATOKO. YOU'RE STILL UNSTEADY ON YOUR FEET...

I-I'M REALLY OKAY NOW... URK...

(ORO STAGGER)

I-I'M SURE...YOU'RE IN SHOCK FROM SO MUCH... AND YOU'RE CONFUSED, THAT'S ALL...

...TODAY YOU SHOULD... STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL AND GET SOME REST...I CAN...GO ON BY MYSELF FROM HERE...

HUFF

HUFF

BA (WHAP)

ARE YOU OKAY ...?

KAA (CAWW)

KAA

KAA

.....

IS THAT A TRASH BAG...? IN A PLACE LIKE THAT...

...CROWS. MAN, THERE'RE A LOT OF THEM...

KAA
(CAWW)

BASA
(FLAP)

KAA

BASA

BASA

...NGH...

KAA

WAAA

SAKURA COLLAPSED)

JARI CRUNCH

.....!?

...WHAT'S THE MATTER, KEIICHI-SAN?

NOOOOO!

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON...!!?

IT'S TRUE THAT I...

...WISHED FOR TAKANO-SAN, OOI-SHI, AND KANTOKU TO DIE...

...BUT...

...I DIDN'T ONCE WISH FOR RIKA-CHAN'S DEATH...!!!

IT... WASN'T ME...

GABA (VOMIT)

N...O...

WHAT THE HELL ...

.....!!

HARA (LOOSE)

PASA (RUSTLE)

...KE...

!!!

...AH...

...AHHH...

...
SATOKO
...?

...MUR
...DER...
ER...

GATA
(SHAKE)

GATA

THIS
IS...

C-
CALM
DOWN,
SATOKO
...

AH...

PLEASE...
CALM
DOWN...

AHH...

NO...IT
WASN'T
ME...

!!

NOOOOOOO!

WAIT... SATOKO...!!! IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK...IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK!!!

YOU KILLED TAKANO-SAN... KANTOKU...AND OOISHI-SAN TOO, RIGHT!!? YOU TRIED TO KILL MY UNCLE... EVEN RIKA... EVEN RIKA ...!!!

I DIDN'T KILL HER!!!

NO !!!

...THIS IS...

FIRST OF ALL, WHAT IS THAT CLEAVER FOR!!? PLEASE TRY EXPLAINING THAT...!!

YOU DON'T REMEMBER WHAT YOU DID, RIGHT!? I CAN'T BELIEVE THE WORDS OF SOMEONE LIKE THAT!!

YOU WERE A LITTLE MEAN... BUT YOU WERE FUN TO BE WITH... AND KIND...I EVEN THOUGHT THAT YOU MIGHT REALLY BE MY NII-NII ONCE... WHY DID YOU TURN OUT THIS WAY!!?

WHY!?

SEE... SEE!!? YOU'RE A... KILLER, KEIICHI-SAN...!!!

WHY!!?

SATOKO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT...

...LIKE SATOKO SAYS...?

AM I...

...REALLY A KILLER...

...DID I BECOME A DEMON... AND ACT FOR OYASHIRO-SAMA, BECOMING A KILLER FOR THE CURSE...?

WITHOUT EVEN RETAINING ANY MEMORIES...

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!!!

HIKKU (HIC)

WH...Y...

YORO (STAGGER)

HIKKU

WHY...?

...AFTER NII-NII DISAPPEARED...WE WERE LONELY FOR A LONG TIME...THEN YOU TRANSFERRED HERE, KEIICHI-SAN... AND EVERYONE CHEERED UP AGAIN...

WHY...

WE HAD SO MUCH FUN... EVERY DAY...WAS SO BRIGHT...!!! ...WHY...?

WHY DID IT TURN OUT LIKE THIS...?

SAAAAAA (WHOOOOOSH)

!!

...SATOKO... ARE YOU OKAY...?

GURA (SWING)

FURA (SWAY)

ST-STAY AWAY FROM ME!! YOU MURDERER !!

I...I... =HIC= I REALLY LIKED YOU, KEIICHI-SAN...!!

...HOW DID... THINGS... TURN OUT LIKE THIS ...?

...WASN'T ME...I KNOW IT WASN'T ...!

BUT... I CAN... SAY THIS... THE ONE WHO KILLED RIKA-CHAN...

I...DON'T KNOW HOW THINGS TURNED OUT LIKE THIS EITHER...

.....

... SATOKO ...

YOU'RE SCARED OF THIS CLEAVER...? THEN I'LL THROW IT AWAY...

CAN YOU... GIVE ME A REASONABLE EXPLANATION... ABOUT THAT CLEAVER...!?

...HOW CAN I BELIEVE THE WORDS OF SOMEONE... WHO CAN'T EVEN TRUST HIS OWN MEMORIES ...!!?

SEE...? IT'S OKAY NOW, RIGHT...? NOW...WILL YOU...LISTEN TO ME...?

HYU (TOSS)

...YOU... WERE PROBABLY... POSSESSED BY SOME-THING BAD...

GISHI

GISHI (CREAK)

...I SORT OF KNEW... THAT YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG...

.....

...IF I THINK ABOUT IT, IT'S POSSIBLE... THAT MAYBE THEY...WERE POSSESSED BY THE SAME THING THAT POSSESSED YOU, KEIICHI-SAN.

BUT I... KNEW...WHEN I LOOKED IN YOUR EYES...

...UNTIL JUST NOW...I THOUGHT YOU WERE A KILLER ...

...I KNOW.... IT'S NOT LIKE...I DON'T REMEMBER IT MYSELF...

A FEW... YEARS AGO... RIKA AND I... WERE PLAYING HIDE-AND-SEEK AT THE SHRINE... I...HAPPENED...

...EH...? SA...TOKO... WHAT ARE... YOU TALKING ABOUT...?

RIKA'S FATHER'S SCARY FACE, AND THE WAY HE PUNISHED HER...I WAS TERRIFIED... IN THE END, I COULDN'T STAND UP AND TELL HIM IT WAS ME!!

I BROKE THE RIGHT ARM OFF OF OYASHIRO-SAMA'S STATUE* ...!!

...TO GO INSIDE THE SAIGUDEN... WHERE WE'RE TOLD NEVER TO GO INSIDE, NO MATTER WHAT...

...THE HEAD PRIEST... RIKA'S FATHER... SCOLDED RIKA FOR TAKING THE KEY...AND PLAYING INSIDE... HE WAS REALLY SCARY...!!

AND... WHEN I DID...I ACCIDENTALLY...

*SATOKO USES THE WORD GOSHINTA, WHICH IS A SACRED OBJECT REPRESENTING A DEITY. THE DEITY'S SPIRIT IS SAID TO RESIDE INSIDE IT.

...BACK THEN... I DEFILED THE SAIGUDEN...AND ABANDONED MY BEST FRIEND... THIS IS MY PUNISHMENT ...

...I KNOW... THAT...THIS... IS OYASHIRO-SAMA'S... CURSE...

AND...YOU TRANSFERRED HERE...AND I THOUGHT OUR FUN DAYS HAD FINALLY COME BACK...BUT NOW YOU'RE POSSESSED, KEIICHI-SAN ...!!!

...MY NII-NII, WHO LOVED ME MORE THAN ANYONE, ABANDONED ME...AND LEFT...

...MY FATHER AND MOTHER DISAPPEARED IN THE MUDDY RIVER...MY MEAN AUNT DIED TOO, BUT...

I'VE HEARD WHEN OYASHIRO-SAMA...REALLY CURSES SOMEONE... THE CURSE STARTS WITH THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO YOU AND KILLS THEM IN ORDER...!!

AND WHEN THE CURSE HAS KILLED EVERYONE, IT FINALLY KILLS YOU ...

THAT'S WHY THE CURSE... GOT YOU TOO, KEIICHI-SAN...!!!

NO MOOO

DON
(SHOVE)

...EH
...?

¡¡OOOOOOOKOTOSAS...OKOTOSAS

...

...SA...

ガ

ビ

HYUOOOOO (WHOOOOSH)

BIIIIIN (TWAAAANG)

GIRI (STRAIN)

GAKUN (SHAKE)

DIE MURDEEERRRR!

GAKUN

SATOKO...

GIRI

MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT...BUT...

...WHAT I DID WAS DEFINITELY... WRONG...

...LISTEN TO JUST THIS ONE THING...

...THAT'S WHY... I JUST... WANTED YOU TO BE HAPPY... THAT'S ALL...

...WE... CAN'T TAKE IT...WHEN YOU'RE NOT SMILING FOR US...

...SO...IF I DISAPPEAR AND YOU CAN START A NEW LIFE...

GI (STRAIN)

...THEN MAKE SURE...

...TO SMILE...

BIN (SNAP)

YOU...!! TO THE VERY END...YOU KEEP PRETENDING TO BE KEIICHI-SAN...!!! STOP TALKING...!!

FAAA

IF...

...I'M ABLE...

...LET ME PRAY FOR ONE MORE THING.

I HAD PROBABLY ALREADY DISAPPEARED.

NO...I... WAS I NEVER CRAZY...

YES. ON THE NIGHT OF THE COTTON DRIFTING.

NOW...I SAY GOOD-BYE TO THIS MESSED-UP WORLD... SEE YOU, HINAMIZAWA...

IN THE END...I WISH I COULD HAVE... SEEN SATOKO SMILE... ONE MORE TIME...

OR HINAMIZAWA...?

AM I... THE ONE THAT'S GONE CRAZY...?

...THAT WE CALL THE WORLD OF HINAMIZAWA.

FOR THE DEATH OF THIS THING...

DOSHA (SPLAT)

SO THAT NO ONE ELSE WILL WANDER INTO THIS MESSED-UP WORLD.

I WAS THE MOST UNHAPPY.

BECAUSE I KNEW THAT THIS MAZE HAD NO EXIT.

HE WAS THE NEXT MOST UNHAPPY.

BECAUSE HE DIDN'T KNOW THAT THIS MAZE HAD NO EXIT.

THE OTHER MASSES WEREN'T UNHAPPY.

BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT THEY WERE IN A MAZE.

FINAL CHAPTER

Frederica Bernkastel

KEIICHI, I'LL TELL YOU YOU'RE A GOOD BOY LATER, SIR.

KEI-CHAAAN!

I'M JEALOUS.

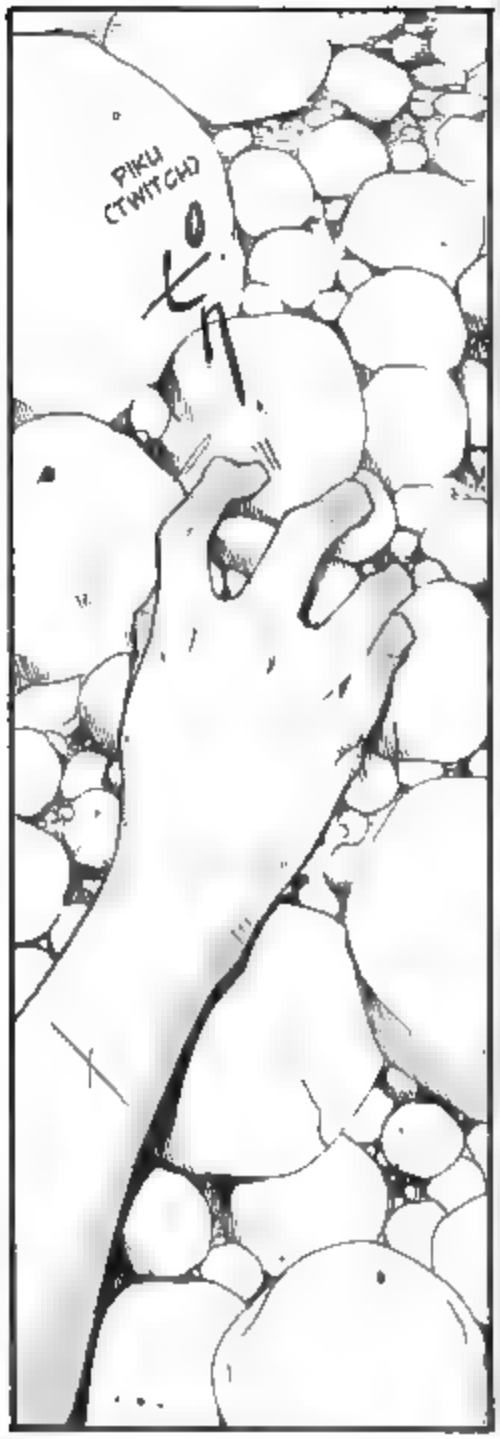
YOU HAVE THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE.

OHHH, KEIICHI-KUN, YOU'RE ADOWABLE.

I'M TAKING YOU HOME WITH ME.

KEIICHI-SAN!

WHATEVER ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?


PIKU
(TWITCH)

ZUKIN (STING)

YORO' (STAGGER)

NGH...

I FELL FROM THERE...

I'M... ...ALIVE...?

SATOKO... PROBABLY ISN'T THERE ANYMORE...

DAMMIT... ANYWAY... I GUESS I'LL GO TO THE CLINIC...

IS THAT WHAT SAVED ME FROM DYING...?

JUST HOW LONG WAS I UNCONSCIOUS...?

HUFF

COUGH COUGH

HUFF

KA (FLASH)

SHIN (SILENCE)

...SILENCE...

IT'S WEIRD...

NOT EVEN A SINGLE CICADA IS MAKING A SOUND...

GUSHA (SQUISH)

!

WHAT'S THIS SMELL I'VE BEEN SMELLING...?

LIKE BURNT EGGS...

DISGUSTING SMELL...

AND THIS ALMOST CREEPY...

WHAT IS THIS? DID THEY SPRAY INSECTICIDE OR SOMETHING?

A DEAD...

...HIGU-RASHI...?

I SHOULD ALMOST BE AT THE SCHOOL. I'M SURE THERE'LL BE SOMEONE AT THE SCHOOL...

BUT...

...WHY ARE THERE... SO MANY TRUCKS... AT THE SCHOOL...?

BJRORORORORO (VRRRRRRRRROOOM)

OH GOOD...

THERE'RE PEOPLE...

WHAT...

...IS...
THIS...?

BAGS...?

AND...

...WHAT ON EARTH...

...ARE THOSE PEOPLE...

...DOING...?

THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM...!!

WHAT ARE THEY FOR...?

THOSE CLOTHES...

GU! (GRAB)

!

HEY, YOU!! HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE!?

WHY...?

THE SELF-DEFENSE FORCE...!? WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE...?

ZUKIN (STING)

HOW DID I GET IN...? OW...!

.....

DO YOU LIVE IN HINAMIZAWA? CAN YOU GIVE US YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS?

...YES... MY NAME IS KEIICHI MAEBARA, AND I LIVE...

HEAD-QUARTERS, PLEASE RESPOND. WE FOUND A 402 SURVIVOR. I REPEAT, WE FOUND A 402 SURVIVOR.

WHAT THE HELL...?

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON...?

This is headquarters. Survivors are to be taken into immediate custody. What is the survivor's condition?

THE SURVIVOR IS IN GOOD HEALTH. WE HAVE CONFIRMED EXTERNAL WOUNDS ALL OVER HIS BODY, BUT THERE IS NO THREAT TO HIS LIFE. HE CAN WALK ON HIS OWN. WE'LL SEND HIM TO HEADQUARTERS RIGHT AWAY.

BURORORO (VRRROOOM)

WHERE WERE YOU? WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

...UM... EXCUSE ME. WHAT HAPPENED...?

WEAR THIS.

KACHI (CLICK)

.....

UM... WHAT...WHY IS THE SELF-DEFENSE FORCE HERE? IS IT SOME KIND OF TRAINING?

I FELL FROM THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE... AND WAS UN-CONSCIOUS ON THE RIVERBED... I DON'T EVEN KNOW...WHAT DAY IT IS TODAY...

ZAZA

—more from the information— have been sent. Now, we'll look back again at the administration's handling of the disaster.

ZAAAA (KKKHHH)

—completely unprecedented— kkhh—magnified the destruction, didn't it? We're waiting for the investigation...

The details are still under investigation, but deadly poisonous volcanic gas erupted from a certain area in the district of Hinamizawa Village. The heavy gas flowed down and created a gas current.

Late at night between June 21 and 22, in the village of Hinamizawa in Shishibone, a large-scale disaster broke out.

The gas current flowed down along the swamp, directly hitting Hinamizawa District. It covered the entire district in a matter of hours...

ZAZAZA

Every household in the district of Hinamizawa Village was wiped out... there were more than... —ictims... The Self-Defense Force is currently assessing the damage, but...

ZAZA

ZAZA

...WHAT... ARE THEY SAYING ...?

...EH...?

WHAT DID THEY SAY?

...GAS...?

DISASTER? WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

...HINAMIZAWA...

WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT...?

BURORORORO (VRRRRRROOOOM)

BATA (STAMP)

BATA

IT'S OKAY NOW. HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

AH...I'M MANAGING...

WILL THIS FIT...?

I CAN PROBABLY JUST MAKE IT

WHAT...

ALL RIGHT.

THE VILLAGE WAS WIPED OUT.

DOSA (THUD)

ALL...

...WAS...

STUPID!! DON'T BE SO ROUGH WITH THE BODIES!! HE'S FROM THE VILLAGE!

AN UNPREC-EDENTED CATASTRO-PHE.

...THE LAST THING...

OH, RIGHT, SO THAT'S IT.

THEN THOSE BAGS BACK THERE...

...I WISHED FOR?

THE DEATH OF HINAMIZAWA ITSELF.

AAAA

MY FINAL WISH...

AGAIN...

HEY!! HE'S LOST CONSCIOUS-NESS!! CALL THE PATIENT'S NAME!!

!!

NOTHING...

...MAKES SENSE ANYMORE...

NOTHING... MATTERS ANYMORE...

MAEBARA-KUN!!

MAEBARA-KUN!

MAEBARA-KUN!? CAN YOU HEAR ME!? IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BLINK!!

IF I WISH... IF I CURSE...

...AND IT COMES TRUE THE NEXT DAY...

...THEN LET ME BE DEAD TOMORROW MORNING...

HE'S STOPPED BREATHING!! CHECK HIS AIRWAY! START ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION!!

!!

OH...

...THOSE FOOTSTEPS, TODAY...

...I DON'T... HEAR...

...THEM...

IT'S NOT OKAY FOR LIFE TO DIE!!

DON'T YOU LET HIM DIE!! DAMMIT, DAMMIT!! I DON'T WANT ANY MORE CASUALTIES!

I'M

FINALLY

FR

EE...

1983, JUNE 22, EARLY DAWN.
WIDESPREAD DISASTER
BROKE OUT IN HINAMIZAWA
VILLAGE, XX PREFECTURE.

VOLCANIC GAS (HYDROGEN
SULPHIDE AND CARBON DIOXIDE)
ERUPTED FROM ONIGAFUCHI SWAMP,
ONE OF THE WATER SOURCES FOR
HINAMIZAWA DISTRICT, COVERING
THE ENTIRE VILLAGE REGION.

A RECORD-BREAKING
CATASTROPHE, WITH
1,200 REPORTED DEAD, TWENTY
REPORTED MISSING, AND 600,000
EVACUATED FROM THE SUR-
ROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES.

FROM SUBSEQUENT
INVESTIGATIONS, WE HAVE
LEARNED THAT THERE IS A MAGMA
RESERVOIR AND A HOT SPRING
DIRECTLY UNDER ONIGAFUCHI
SWAMP, AND THE GAS THAT BOILED
UP FROM IT WAS DETERMINED TO
BE THE CAUSE OF THE DISASTER.

FURTHERMORE,
IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE DISASTER OCCURRED, PEOPLE SHOWED UP IN DROVES, CLAMORING THAT THIS WAS A "CURSE," IN ACCORDANCE WITH HINAMIZAWA FOLKLORE, AGITATING THE INITIAL CHAOS.

IT IS SAID THERE IS A LEGEND THAT WHEN THE CURSE IS IN HINAMIZAWA, A MIASMA RISES UP AND DESTROYS THE VILLAGE; SCHOLARS ARE SPECULATING THAT PERHAPS THERE WAS A SIMILAR OCCURRENCE IN THE PAST THAT REMAINED IN THE VILLAGE AS LEGEND.

SIGN: NO TRESPASSING

SIGN: ROAD BLOCK

THE DISTRICT OF HINAMIZAWA VILLAGE HAS BECAME THE OBJECT OF VARIOUS RUMORS AND SPECULATIONS; IT IS CURRENTLY BLOCKADED, AND TRAVELING IN ITS AIRSPACE IS FORBIDDEN.

立入禁止

通行止

EVERYONE SAYS THE VILLAGE, LEFT TO ROT WITH ALL TRACES OF LIFE LEFT WHERE THEY WERE, CONTINUES TO SLEEP, DEAD TO THE WORLD.

THE LAST REMAINING SURVIVOR, KEIICHI MAEBARA CAGE DO, A BOY WHO LIVED AT XXX IN HINAMIZAWA VILLAGE...

...WAS BREATHING ERRATICALLY FROM THE GAS AT THE TIME OF HIS RESCUE AND STARTED TO SUFFER PULMONARY EDEMA, BUT HE ESCAPED DEATH AND IS CURRENTLY A PATIENT AT A GENERAL-PREFECTURAL HOSPITAL. REPORTERS HAVE PRESSED HIM FOR DAYS, BUT HE REFUSES ALL INTERVIEWS.

WHAT HAPPENED IN HINAMIZAWA BETWEEN JUNE 21 AND JUNE 22?

TO THIS DAY, HE REMAINS SILENT AND WON'T SAY A WORD.

Hinamizawa Disaster Victims List

Jirou Tomitake (real name unknown)
June 19, 1983; suicide within the village?
Investigation suspended.

Miyo Takano
June 19, 1983; hanged in the mountains in Gifu Prefecture.
The corpse was burned. Investigation pending.

Kuraudo Ooishi
June 20, 1983; went missing during an investigation.
Investigation pending.

Katsuya Kumagai
June 20, 1983; went missing during an investigation.
Investigation pending.

Kyosuke Irie
June 21, 1983; suicide inside his clinic?
Investigation suspended.

Rika Furude
June 21, 1983; murdered at the shrine?
Investigation suspended.

Reina Ryugu
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Mion Sonozaki
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Oryou Sonozaki
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Satoko Hojo
June 22, 1983; missing in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Teppei Hojo
June 22, 1983; missing in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Ichiro Maebara
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Aiko Maebara
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Daiki Tomita
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Suguru Okamura
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Rumiko Chie
June 22, 1983; died in an accident while evacuating from the Hinamizawa Disaster.

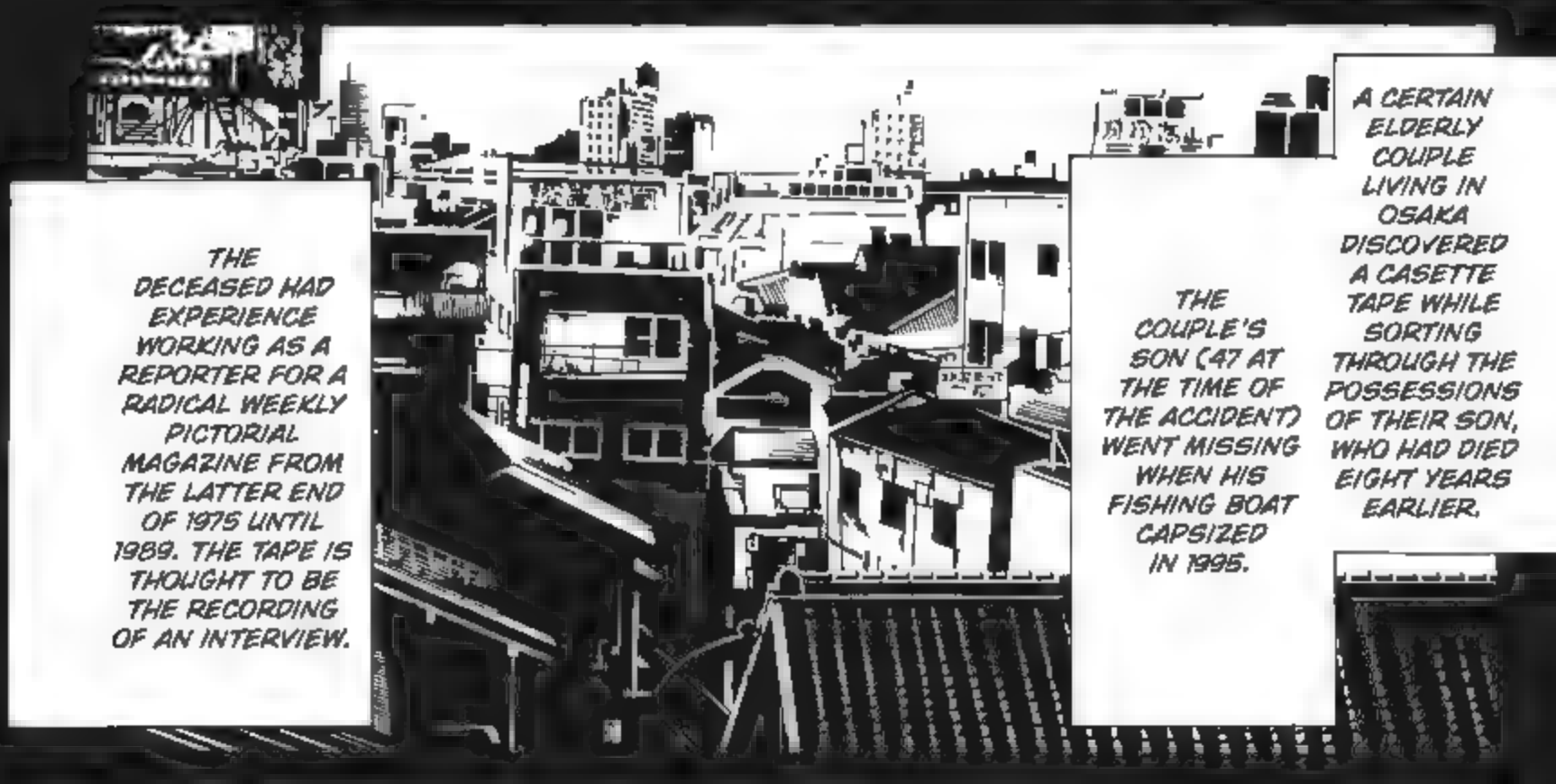
Kiichiro Kimiyoshi
June 22, 1983; died in the Hinamizawa Disaster.

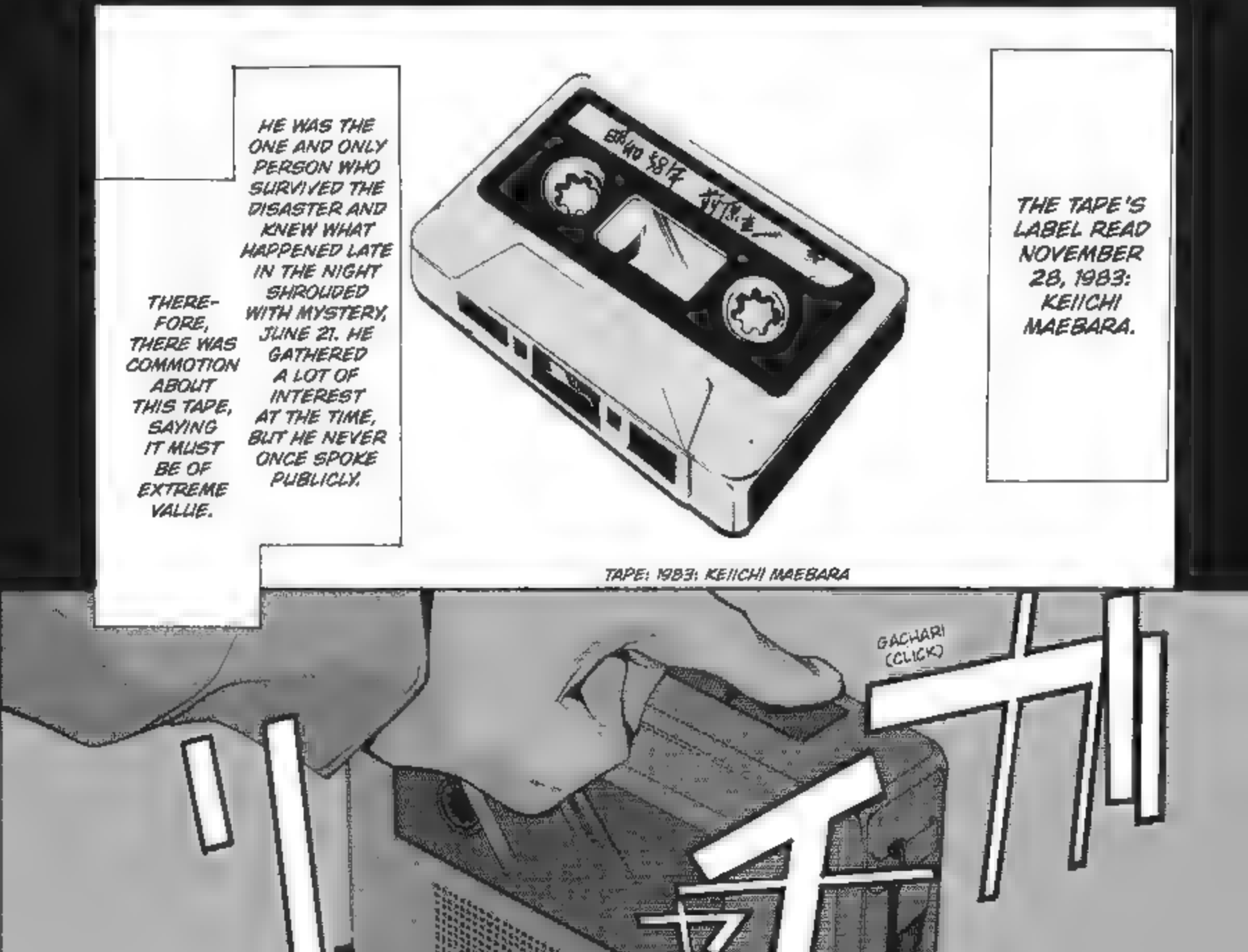
Yukikazu Kameda
June 22, 1983; died in an accident while evacuating from the Hinamizawa Disaster.

Tatsuyoshi Kasai
August 11, 1983; died at the hospital where he was admitted.

Shion Sonozaki
August 27, 1983; killed herself at the hospital where she was admitted. Investigation complete.

<LATE SUMMER, 2003>


THE DECEASED HAD EXPERIENCE WORKING AS A REPORTER FOR A RADICAL WEEKLY PICTORIAL MAGAZINE FROM THE LATTER END OF 1975 UNTIL 1989. THE TAPE IS THOUGHT TO BE THE RECORDING OF AN INTERVIEW.
THE COUPLE'S SON (47 AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT) WENT MISSING WHEN HIS FISHING BOAT CAPSIZED IN 1995.
A CERTAIN ELDERLY COUPLE LIVING IN OSAKA DISCOVERED A CASETTE TAPE WHILE SORTING THROUGH THE POSSESSIONS OF THEIR SON, WHO HAD DIED EIGHT YEARS EARLIER.


THEREFORE, THERE WAS COMMOTION ABOUT THIS TAPE, SAYING IT MUST BE OF EXTREME VALUE.
HE WAS THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON WHO SURVIVED THE DISASTER AND KNEW WHAT HAPPENED LATE IN THE NIGHT SHROUDED WITH MYSTERY, JUNE 21. HE GATHERED A LOT OF INTEREST AT THE TIME, BUT HE NEVER ONCE SPOKE PUBLICLY.
THE TAPE'S LABEL READ NOVEMBER 28, 1983: KEIICHI MAEBARA.
TAPE: 1983: KEIICHI MAEBARA
GACHARI (CLICK)

Don't let it bother you. See, if I do this, it won't bother you that I'm recording you, right?

When I think I'm being recorded...it kind of makes it really hard to talk...

(AFTER THIS, THE QUALITY OF THE RECORDING SUDDENLY DETERIORATED; DID HE PUT SOMETHING OVER THE RECORDER?)

Well, let's get started. My first question. Where were you on the night of the disaster, Keiichi-kun?

...If you pass through behind the shrine...and go through the forest for a while... there's a suspension bridge, a little before you get into the mountains. ...I had fallen from there and was unconscious.

...And about the riverbed where you say you were unconscious. Did you know that there are rumors that say that that's actually impossible?

...I think it's a pretty cruel opinion, myself. Please don't be offended.

...This isn't a joke. Please don't say those things.

...To be frank, some people say that you knew beforehand that the disaster was going to happen, and you fell from the bridge while escaping.

What were you doing there? It's pretty far from your house and the school.

They say that scholars performed experiments to see how long it would take for the volcanic gas to cover the village after erupting from its source at Onigafuchi Swamp using very precise models.

...And the gas...pours down that riverbed you say you were unconscious in.

...Why... is it impossible ...?

Impos-sible...

...again... with the "impossible" ...?

At the time of the disaster, you hid your-self in a safe place...waited for when the gas had dispersed some to show up and have the Defense Force take you into custody.

Well? Am I right?

To be frank...I think you might be lying.

In other words, if you were really unconscious in the riverbed, you would have been inside extremely poisonous volcanic gas for an entire night.

It wouldn't surprise you...What do you mean?

.....Even if that was the case... It wouldn't surprise me much now.

THERE ARE OPINIONS THAT DOUBT WHETHER IT IS ACTUALLY KEIICHI MAEBARA RECORDED ON THIS TAPE.

I should be dead, and I'm alive...To try to prove that...ha-ha...

AH-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

...Someone who should not be in one place is, and someone who should be dead is alive...It's not anything unusual.

...You just said it, didn't you? That it's "impossible." In that village of Hinamizawa, a lot of impossible things happen.

TO CONFIRM THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE TAPE, WE HAD THEM MATCH IT AGAINST THE VOICE ON TAPES FROM MAEBARA FAMILY RELATIVES, BUT THE RECORDING ISN'T VERY CLEAR, AND MANY YEARS HAD PASSED, SO WE WERE UNABLE TO GAIN ANY DEFINITIVE PROOF.

What do I mean...? I'm answering your question.

Eh? Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha. What do you mean?

No, that's not true. Because the fifth year's curse was me.

Ah-ha...ha-ha-ha...All right, Keiichi-kun, let's change the subject. What do you think about the talks that maybe the disaster was the fifth year of the curse, the series of mysterious deaths in Hinamizawa?

FURTHER, THERE ARE STILL DOUBTS AS TO THE DATE WRITTEN ON THE TAPE, NOVEMBER 28.

...You see, I... wished that the entire village would die, so it happened.

That disaster... Well, you probably won't believe me if I tell you. But I caused it.

Bold...? ...That's an interesting way to put it.

Ha-ha-ha... that's... a pretty bold tale.

BECAUSE KEIICHI MAEBARA ATTEMPTED SUICIDE ON A CERTAIN DAY IN AUGUST, TWO MONTHS AFTER THE DISASTER. HE WAS DETERMINED TO HAVE A MENTAL DISORDER AND TRANSFERRED TO A MEDICAL INSTITUTION.

Foot-steps...? You say... Ha-ha-ha... What are those?

Yeah...for example... the "foot-steps"...I guess...

I killed Takano-san, and I killed Kantoku and Ooishi. ...At the time, I had a power like some kind of divine possession inside me...

It might be interesting for you, starting today, to try stopping suddenly when you're walking...Then... if you hear one extra footstep... You'd better be careful...Heh... heh-heh-heh...

You've... never heard footsteps before...? Step, step, tap, tap... Heh-heh-heh-heh...

AND THAT INSTUTITION DID NOT ALLOW ANY KIND OF INTERVIEWS, SO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THERE ARE ANY PRESS TAPES WITH A DATE AFTER AUGUST OF 1983 IS EXTREMELY LOW.

Is what I'm saying THAT funny?

Ah, ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Y-you're right. I'll make sure to be careful... Ha-ha...ha-ha!!

...You're like Kantoku... You pretend to sympathize and listen to what I have to say, but actually... You have the eyes of someone dealing with a madman...

You've... been laughing stupidly at everything...

Ha-ha... ha-ha. It's not like that at all. Ah-ha-ha...

When I was at my prime back then, they definitely died the next day... So what about you? Heh... ha-ha-ha-ha-

AH-HA-HA-HA-HA!

Then YOU'LL drown!!

...Yeah. And today I'll try deciding how you'll die too... Takano-san burned to death, after all...

...I haven't heard the footsteps since that day...So I probably don't have that terrifying power anymore...But right here and now, I'll try wishing one more time, for your death...

俺は如月恭サレルナラ呪殺サレル！？

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE KILLED BY A CURSE FROM THE LIKES OF ME!

HA HA HA

...AND...

...KEIICHI MAEBARA DIED SUDDENLY, TWO DAYS AFTER THE INTERVIEW, OF A HIGH FEVER OF UNKNOWN CAUSE. WE HAVE RECORDS OF HIS REPEATING A MYSTERIOUS PHRASE OVER THE NURSE CALL THE DAY HE PASSED AWAY.

"THERE'S AN EXTRA FOOTSTEP AGAIN..."

CURSE KILLING ARC

FIN

ABOUT THE "CURSE KILLING ARC"
IN ORDER TO BREAK THROUGH THE TRAGEDY

ORIGINAL STORY, SUPERVISOR: RYUKISHI07

THE "CURSE KILLING ARC" IS THE THIRD SCENARIO IN "HIGURASHI WHEN THEY CRY" AND IS AN IMPORTANT STORY THAT FINISHES OFF THE THREE "HIGURASHI" QUESTION ARCS. ALSO, IN THE SENSE OF SEEKING WHAT'S NECESSARY TO BREAK THROUGH THE TRAGEDIES OF THIS WORLD, IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SCENARIO.

SATOKO'S SUFFERING IS DEPICTED EXTREMELY HEART-BREAKINGLY IN THIS SCENARIO. AND MORE FRIGHTENING THAN ANYTHING, I THINK IT BRINGS WITH IT THE RAW SENSE OF REALITY THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR COULD SUDDENLY HAPPEN CLOSE TO ANYONE AT ANY TIME.

IN A WAY, THE "CURSE KILLING ARC" IS THE MOST LIGHTHEARTED OF THE "HIGURASHI" ARCS, AND IN A WAY, PERHAPS IT COULD BE SAID THAT IT'S THE MOST DIFFERENT FROM THE MAIN WORLD OF "HIGURASHI." BUT THE KEY HIDDEN IN THIS SCENARIO IS ANOTHER VERY IMPORTANT ONE. IT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT IT WOULDN'T BE AN EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT IT'S FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE KEYS OF ALL THE THREE QUESTION ARCS, AND IT'S THE MASTER KEY OF THE "HIGURASHI" WORLD.

UNFORTUNATELY, KEIICHI WASN'T ABLE TO OBTAIN THAT KEY IN THIS INSTANCE. HE'LL FINALLY GAIN THIS KEY IN A LATER SCENARIO. I WONDER IF ALL OF YOU WERE ABLE TO FIND IT...?

HIGURASHI
WHEN THEY CRY
CURSE KILLING ARC ❷

RYUKISHI07
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Lettering: AndWorld Design

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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